

# UK application rates by the January deadline

UCAS

2017 cycle

UCAS Analysis and Research  
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## Key findings

### January deadline application rates provide the first reliable indication of young demand for full-time undergraduate higher education

UCAS is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK. People who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline are considered 'on time' for the large majority of courses. Application rates (the proportion of the population who apply) for those who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline, give the first reliable indicator of demand for full-time higher education from young people in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, there is a substantial component (around one third of young full-time higher education) where admissions are not processed through UCAS. Consequently, for Scotland, this report reflects the trends in applications that are recruited through UCAS and not, as elsewhere in the UK, full-time undergraduate study in general.

### Application rates for 18 year olds from England increased to new high

18 year olds from England were more likely to apply to higher education through UCAS than in any previous year, with an application rate of 37 per cent. This is an increase of 0.4 percentage points on 2016, meaning that applicants were 1.2 per cent more likely to have applied this year than last year. However, this is the smallest increase in the application rate since the fall in 2012, and a third of the increase typically seen in recent cycles.

Wales (32 per cent) and Northern Ireland (48 per cent) saw decreases in their 18 year old application rates, while the application rate for Scotland (33 per cent) remained the same, compared to 2016.

### Application rates fell for all older age groups in England and Wales

Application rates are lower for older age groups, and it is more difficult to interpret trends at the January deadline, as there are proportionally more applications received from these groups later in the cycle, compared to young applicants.

The 'first time' application rates at age 19 only include those applicants who did not apply in the previous cycle. In 2017, the first time application rate decreased for 19 year olds in England (8.5 per cent), Wales (7.1 per cent), and Northern Ireland (6.6 per cent), with a small increase in Scotland (5.6 per cent).

The application rate from applicants aged 20 years or older in England and Wales fell substantially in 2017 – nearly all of the older age groups had a proportional decrease larger than in 2012. Applicants in England and Wales aged 20 years or older are now less likely to apply for higher education in 2017, than in 2012. This was the third consecutive year of reductions in the application rate for those aged between 20 and 39 years old in England.

Northern Ireland also saw reductions in the application rates of applicants aged 24 years or older, whereas Scottish applicants aged 30 years and older applied at the highest recorded levels.

### **Young cohort application rates increased to record levels for England, Wales, and Scotland**

Overall young demand for higher education can be measured through cohort rates that report the proportion of the cohort of young people that have applied either aged 18 or, a year later, aged 19. They give a fuller picture of young demand that is not affected by changes in the decision of the age of first applying to higher education.

Driven by the strong growth in the 18 year old application rate in the previous year, the young cohort application rates for those aged 18 in 2016 and 19 in 2017 increased to 45 per cent in England, and 39 per cent in both Wales and Scotland. The Northern Ireland cohort application rate remains at a high level of 55 per cent.

### **Small increases in 18 year old application rates across English regions**

Application rates increased for nearly all English regions in 2017. There was stronger growth in London and the North East, where 18 year old applicants were three per cent more likely than last year to apply to higher education in these regions. There was no change in the application rate in the North West.

The highest application rate continued to be for London (46 per cent in 2017), where 18 year olds were a quarter more likely to apply to higher education than 18 year olds from England as a whole.

Similar trends in application rates can be seen at higher resolutions of geography, where the application rates of 18 year olds in each parliamentary constituency roughly follow regional trends. Because the 18 year old population in constituencies is smaller relative to regions, they are subject to larger fluctuations from year to year. 18 year old application rates by constituency vary between 17 per cent and 70 per cent – nearly half of the constituencies had between 30 and 40 per cent of the 18 year old population apply to higher education in 2017.

### **Application rates of disadvantaged 18 year olds in the UK reach highest recorded levels**

In 2017, application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas (measured through the POLAR3 classification) in England increased to the highest levels recorded, while they remained constant in Northern Ireland and fell in Wales. Application rates from the most disadvantaged areas were 22.5 per cent in England, 24.4 per cent in Northern Ireland, and 19.7 per cent in Wales.

The application rate increased from the most advantaged backgrounds in England and Northern Ireland, and fell in Wales. The ratio of application rates between the most and least advantaged stabilised, with advantaged UK 18 year olds being 2.4 times more likely to apply than disadvantaged UK 18 year olds. This is reflected across the countries of the UK.

Application rates of 18 year olds living in disadvantaged areas in Scotland, defined using the latest 2016 version of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, increased in 2017 to 17 per cent – the highest recorded. 18 year olds living in these areas became seven per cent more likely to apply than in 2016, and 70 per cent more likely to apply than in 2006.

### **Differences in application rates between men and women in 2017 remain high**

Across the UK, young women are more likely to apply than young men, and the difference in application rates between them remains the highest on record. In England, young women are 35 per cent more likely than young men to apply to higher education, a small decrease in the difference between the two sexes since last year.

A fall in the rate of young men in Scotland applying means that young Scottish women are now 60 per cent more likely to apply than men, the largest gap on record. In Wales, the difference in application rates in 2017 decreased due to a fall in the application rate for women, and a record high in the application rate of 18 year old men. The difference in application rates in Northern Ireland remained largely unchanged.

Young women are more likely to apply than men across all backgrounds, but to a greater extent in disadvantaged areas. In disadvantaged areas in England, the application rate for young women grew more than three times as much as the rate for young men, meaning young women are now 60 per cent more likely to apply than young men in these areas. In advantaged areas, young women are 21 per cent more likely to apply than young men.

### **Record high in the application rate of applicants studying A levels in 2017 – BTEC application rate falls**

The proportion of UK 18 year olds who apply while studying for at least three A levels (not in combination with other qualifications) increased in 2017 to 23.6 per cent. The proportion has increased in each cycle since 2013, after falling to its lowest level in 2012, and is now above the previous highest level seen in 2011.

The proportion of UK 18 year olds who apply while studying Level 3 BTEC qualifications has decreased this year, after strong growth between 2012 and 2015. In 2017, the proportion who applied while studying only BTECs was 3.6 per cent, a drop of 0.3 percentage points (eight per cent proportionally) compared to last year, but still 46 per cent higher than in 2012. The proportion who apply while studying

for BTECs in combination with A levels was 1.7 per cent in 2017, the first time there has been no increase in application rates for this qualification group.

The proportion of UK 18 year olds who apply while studying for Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) Highers or Advanced Highers, or the International Baccalaureate, has remained constant since 2010. In 2017, 2.2 per cent of UK 18 year olds applied while studying SQA Highers or Advanced Highers, and 0.4 per cent applied while studying for the International Baccalaureate.

### **Reapplication rates of unplaced 18 year olds drops in 2017, but persistent demand remains at high level**

Around 15 to 20 per cent of 18 year old UK applicants are typically unplaced at the end of an application cycle.

The proportion of these unplaced applicants who reapplied aged 19 in the 2017 cycle is 43 per cent in England, 38 per cent in Wales, 35 per cent in Scotland, and 36 per cent in Northern Ireland. These reapplication rates have fallen compared to recent cycles, although they are substantially higher than levels typical for cohorts aged 18 in 2006 and 2007.

In England, 19 year old reapplication rates decreased by three per cent, while the 18 year old acceptance rate for this cohort increased slightly. The proportion of 18 year olds who, having applied in 2016, were either accepted in 2016 or reapplied in 2017, has remained at 92 per cent for the fourth consecutive year.

### **January deadline application rates take account of population changes**

January deadline application rates are the first reliable indicators of changes in demand for higher education from the UK.

Application rates – the proportion of the population who apply – are the best measures of changes in applicant behaviour, as they account for the size of the population.

The 18 year old population is estimated to have decreased in size in 2017 by 6,100 in England, 300 in Northern Ireland, 1,500 in Scotland, and 800 in Wales. These decreases are set against a longer term trend of a decreasing 18 year old population, and there are now 7 to 12 per cent fewer 18 year olds in each country across the UK than there were in 2009.

The January deadline application rates for 18 year olds are a particularly important indicator, since they have generally not had the opportunity to apply in earlier cycles, and nearly all of their applications are made by this point.

## Introduction

Applications for entry to higher education (HE) through UCAS provide the first measures of the demand for full-time undergraduate study. People who submit their applications to UCAS by the 15 January deadline are considered 'on time' applicants for the large majority of courses. These deadline applicants account for the majority (typically 85 per cent) of all UK domiciled applicants in a cycle, and almost all (typically 97 per cent) of 18 year old UK domiciled applicants. Their numbers can be used to measure trends in demand for this type of higher education.

In England, Northern Ireland, and Wales, the applicants and acceptances recorded through UCAS represent the overwhelming majority of full-time undergraduate higher education. In Scotland, there is a substantial component of full-time higher education (around one third of young full-time higher education) where admissions are not processed centrally through UCAS. Consequently, the levels and trends for demand for full-time undergraduate higher education in Scotland in this report reflect that for the provision that is recruited through UCAS and not, as elsewhere in the UK, full-time undergraduate study in general.

One way to measure demand for higher education from the UK is through application rates. These report the proportion of a group of the population that makes an application. As such, they directly measure demand in terms of the propensity to apply to higher education. The advantage of using application rates is that they show trends in this measure of demand without being affected by year to year changes in the population size. This is important as changes in the population size can have a substantial effect on applicant numbers, often as large as any change in application rate, and the demographic trends for different age groups can be in different directions.

The population estimates used for the application rates in this report are based on mid-year estimates and national population projections published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and based on the 2011 census.

The main analysis looks at trends in the application rate of 18 year olds by country, region, parliamentary constituency, area-based background, sex, and qualifications. This age group has the highest application rate to UCAS – they account for around half of UK applicants at the January deadline, and (in previous cycles) nearly all of the cycle total is recorded by the January deadline. They are a particularly important group when using application rate trends to assess demand for higher education – they will not have had a previous opportunity to apply to higher education and so their trends can be assessed without making allowance for application or entry rates in previous cycles.

After 18 year olds, the next largest age-specific application rate from the UK is for those aged 19. This rate is more difficult to interpret since it is influenced by the application and acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. Whereas 18 year olds are usually applying for higher education for the first time, 19 year olds

typically fall into one of two categories – applying for the first time or reapplying after having already made an application aged 18. Therefore, the demand by country at age 19 is investigated through application rates for ‘first time’ applicants, and the overall young demand by country is reported through cohort rates that measure the proportion of a young cohort that have applied either aged 18 or aged 19.

The January deadline is the first opportunity to assess the extent to which unplaced 18 year old applicants from the previous cycle have made another application (‘reapplication’) through UCAS. These reapplication rates give another indicator of demand for higher education, and are examined by country of domicile. Reapplication rates can vary considerably from cycle to cycle, but when considered alongside the acceptance rate in the previous cycle, give rise to a measure of persistent demand that is relatively consistent.

Application rates by country for older age groups are also reported. These are more complex to interpret as they have the potential to be affected by changes in the entry rate at earlier ages.

Data files to allow the replication of all the figures in this report are available with this publication on the UCAS website.



## Application rates of 18 year olds by country

January deadline 18 year old application rates (the proportion of the 18 year old population making an application through UCAS by the January deadline) by UK country are shown in Figure 1.

In 2017, the application rate of 18 year olds in England who applied for full-time higher education through UCAS by the January deadline (37.0 per cent) reached the highest level recorded since 2006. The application rate in Scotland (32.6 per cent) remained the same, while Wales (31.7 per cent) and Northern Ireland (47.5 per cent) saw decreases in the application rate.

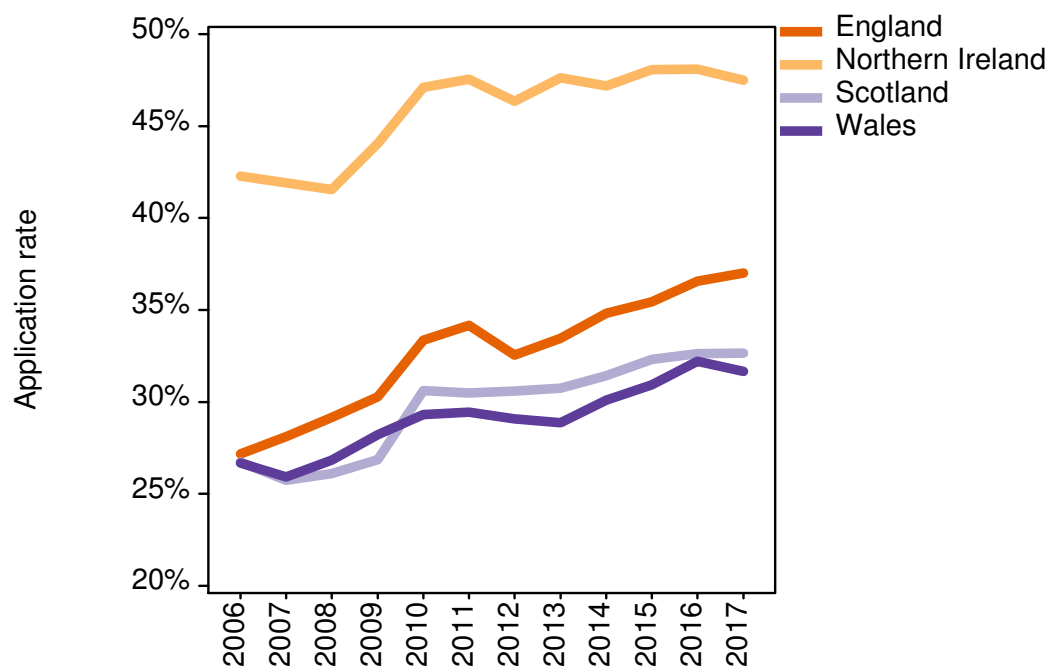
In England in 2017, application rates increased by 0.4 percentage points (1.2 per cent proportionally) from 2016. This is the fifth successive increase in the application rate following a decrease in 2012 (coinciding with the introduction of higher and more variable tuition fees).

Application rates for 18 year olds in Wales decreased in 2017 by 0.6 percentage points (-1.7 per cent proportionally), the first decrease for Wales since 2013.

Application rates in Scotland changed very little between 2010 and 2013 – the increase in 2010 coincided with more HE in Scotland using UCAS, as generally not all HE in Scotland uses UCAS. From 2014 to 2016, the application rate grew steadily, and in 2017 remained at the 2016 level of 32.6 per cent.

In 2017, the application rate in Northern Ireland decreased by 0.6 percentage points to 47.5 per cent (-1.2 per cent proportionally). Since 2010, application rates from Northern Ireland have been at the same level (around 46 to 48 per cent) with some variations year on year, including a significant decrease in 2012 at the same time as application rates in England decreased.

**Figure 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by country**



**Table 1 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by country**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
England	27.2%	28.1%	29.2%	30.3%	33.4%	34.2%	32.5%	33.5%	34.8%	35.4%	36.6%	37.0%
Northern Ireland	42.3%	41.9%	41.6%	44.1%	47.1%	47.6%	46.3%	47.6%	47.2%	48.1%	48.1%	47.5%
Scotland	26.7%	25.7%	26.1%	26.9%	30.6%	30.5%	30.6%	30.7%	31.4%	32.3%	32.6%	32.6%
Wales	26.7%	25.9%	26.8%	28.2%	29.3%	29.5%	29.1%	28.9%	30.1%	30.9%	32.2%	31.7%

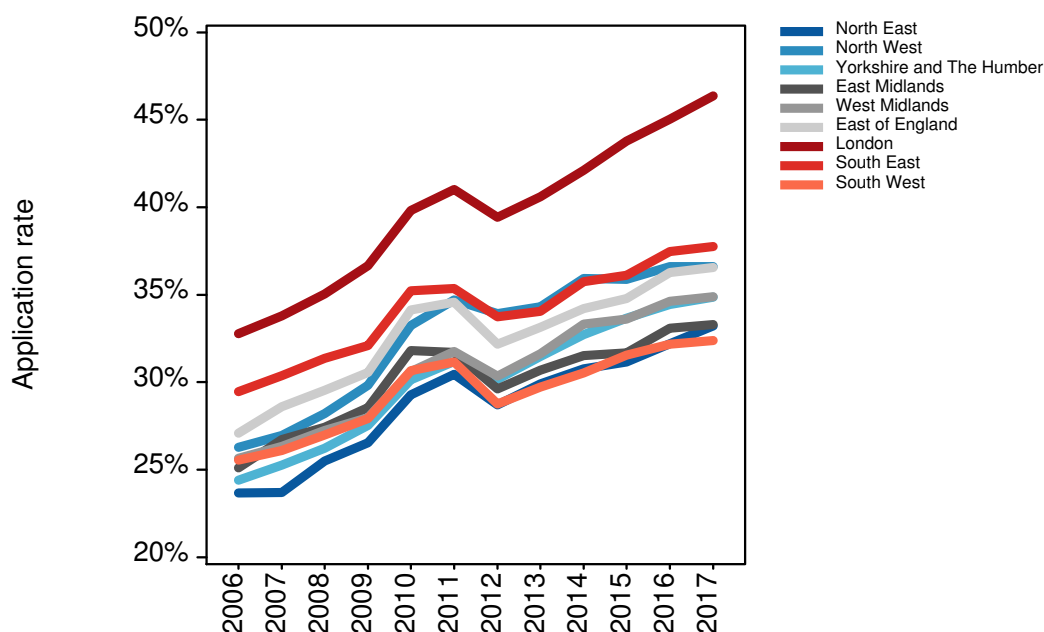
## Application rates of 18 year olds by region

The 18 year old population of England (around 625k) far exceeds the populations of Scotland (around 60k), Northern Ireland (around 25k), and Wales (around 35k). This larger population size allows the subdivision of application rates for England by region.

Figure 2 shows the 18 year old application rate for applicants from the nine regions of England. In all regions, the application rate has increased since 2006 and, in general, each region reflects the national trend of increases or decreases. For instance, the application rate in 2012 fell in all regions and generally increased in subsequent cycles. The highest application rate in each year in the period was from London (46.4 per cent in 2017). The lowest application rate from the period was from the North East in 2006 (23.7 per cent), meanwhile the South West had the lowest application rate for 18 year olds in 2017 (32.4 per cent).

This variation across regions means that in 2017, 18 year olds from London were (proportionally) 43 per cent more likely to apply, compared to 18 year olds from the South West. The greatest proportional increase in the application rate over the period is from the Yorkshire and the Humber region (43 per cent proportional increase, from 24.4 per cent in 2006 to 34.9 per cent in 2017), and the smallest proportional increase is from the South West (27 per cent proportional increase, from 25.5 per cent in 2006 to 32.4 per cent in 2017).

**Figure 2 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds by region**



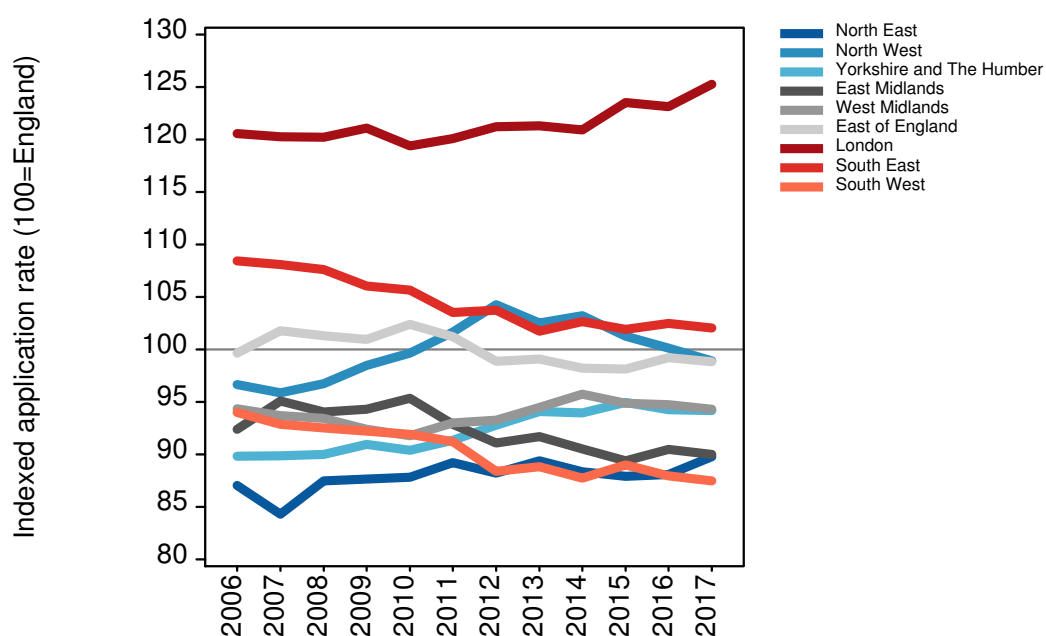
A large part of the year to year changes in each region's application rate is a reflection of the national trend. Therefore, a clearer picture of how application rates by region are changing relative to each other is given by taking away the effect of the national trend. This is done in Figure 3, which uses the same application rates by region, but shows them indexed to the national average, so that an index of 100 represents the 18 year old application rate for the whole of England that year. For example, in 2017 the application rate in London is 25 per cent higher (proportionally) than the national average, and therefore 18 year olds from London are a quarter more likely to apply, compared to 18 year olds from England as a whole.

Since 2006, the application rate in the North West has increased from being around three per cent (proportionally) below the national average, to being only one per cent below the national average in 2017. The Yorkshire and the Humber region has also seen a steady increase relative to the national average, increasing from ten per cent below the national average in 2006, to six per cent below in 2017.

In contrast, over the same period, the application rate from the South East has changed from being eight per cent above the national average to being just two per cent above it. The application rates from the South West and East Midlands have also seen a steady decrease relative to the national average. In the South West, the application rate has changed from being six per cent below the national average to being 12 per cent below, while for the East Midlands, the application rate has changed from being five per cent lower than the national average in 2010, to being ten per cent lower in 2017. These changes mean that application rates in the South West and East Midlands are among the lowest in the country, alongside the North East.

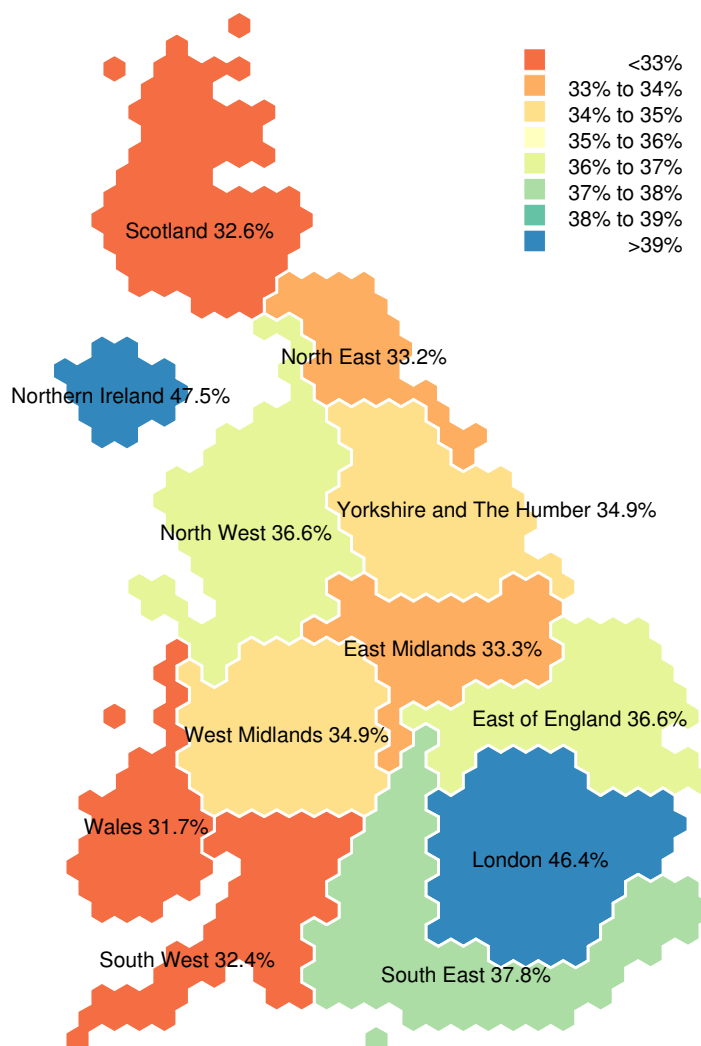
Some of these changes have reduced or reversed the relative application rate differences between regions over the period. In 2006, 18 year olds in the South East were 12 per cent more likely to apply to higher education than those living in the North West. In 2017, this decreased so that 18 year olds in the South East were three per cent more likely to apply to higher education than those living in the North West. In 2006, 18 year olds in the South West were five per cent proportionally more likely to apply to higher education than those living in Yorkshire and the Humber. In 2017, this has been reversed to 18 year olds from Yorkshire and the Humber being seven per cent (proportionally) more likely to apply than those in the South West.

**Figure 3 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds by region (indexed to 100 = England)**



The geographical patterns of English regional application rates, together with application rates for countries elsewhere in the UK (for the most part, demand for HE in further education colleges in Scotland is not recorded), can be shown on maps. Figure 4 maps the 2017 application rates for 18 year olds. The maps used (see Thomas, B. and Dorling, D., 2007, Identity in Britain: A cradle-to-grave atlas, Bristol: Policy Press) are designed so that the size of each area approximates the size of its population, and their arrangement approximates the geographical locations of the areas. Among these units of English regions and other UK countries, Northern Ireland (47.5 per cent) and London (46.4 per cent) had the highest application rates in 2017. Wales (31.7 per cent), the North East (33.2 per cent), East Midlands (33.3 per cent), the South West (32.4 per cent), and Scotland (32.6 per cent), are the regions where application rates were lowest in 2017.

**Figure 4 January deadline application rates in 2017 for UK 18 year olds by region and country**



The geographical patterns of proportional changes in application rates between 2006 and 2017 are shown in Figure 5. Three regions – Yorkshire and the Humber, the North East, and London – have seen the highest proportional increases, with application rates in each of these regions increasing by at least 40 per cent. The North West, West Midlands, and the East of England have also seen proportional increases of over a third. Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland saw the lowest proportional increases over this period (under 25 per cent).

**Figure 5 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2006 and 2017 for UK 18 year olds by region and country**

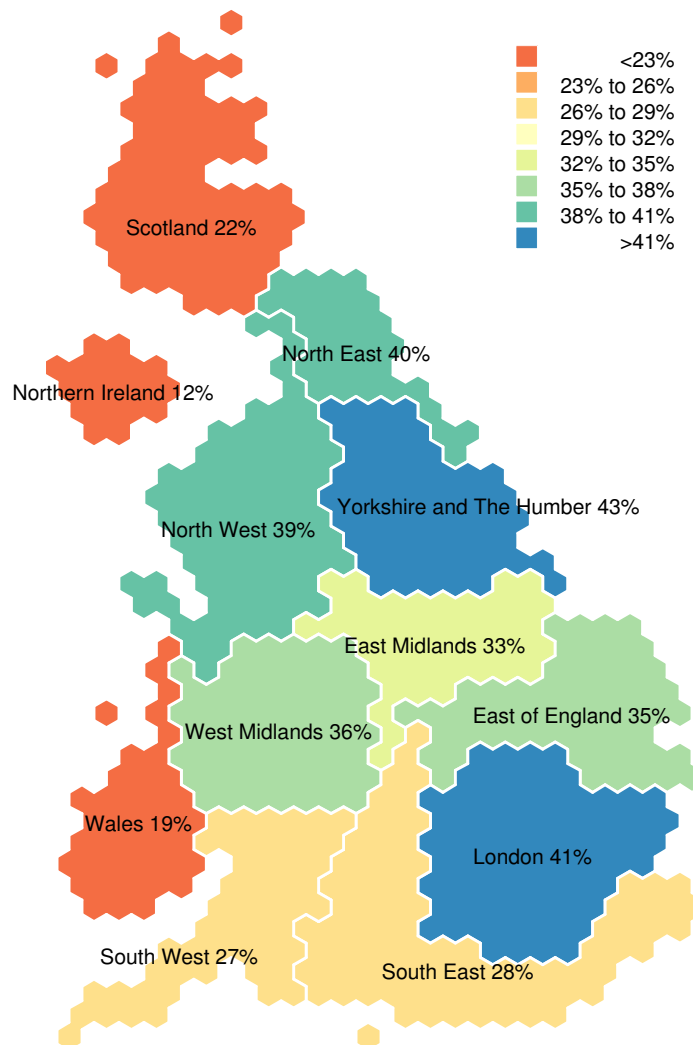
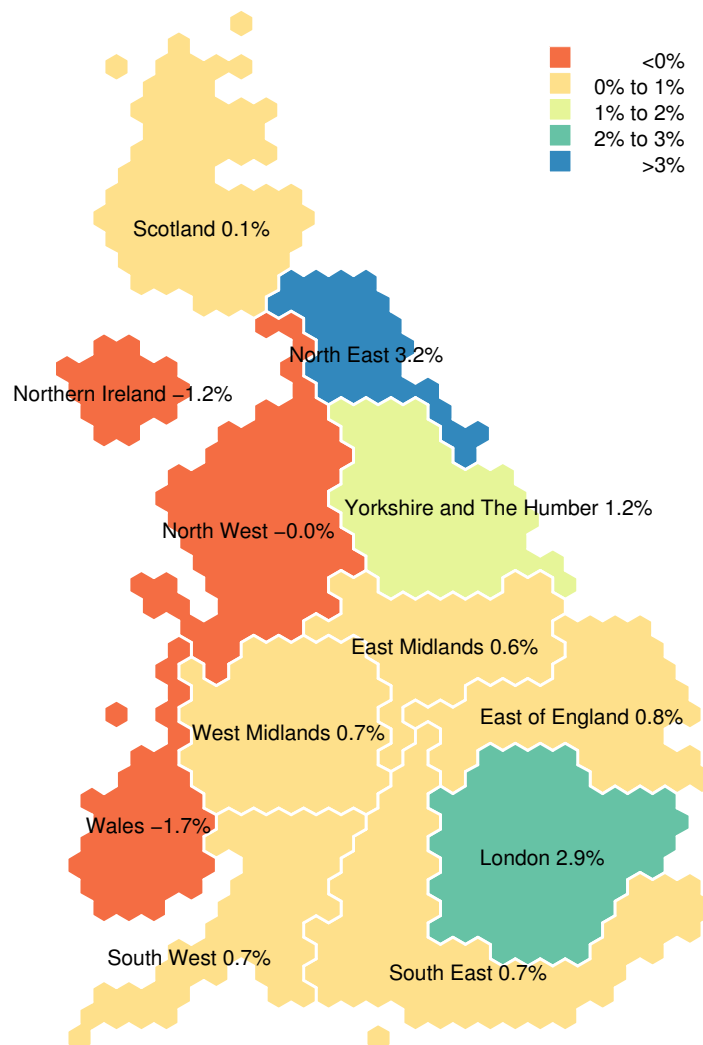


Figure 6 shows the proportional change in 18 year old application rates in 2017 compared with the previous cycle. The greatest proportional increases were from 18 year olds from the North East and London, who were around three per cent more likely to apply in 2017 than in 2016. The majority of the other regions saw proportional increases of less than one per cent, while the application rate from the North West remained the same, and those from Northern Ireland and Wales decreased.

**Figure 6 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2016 and 2017 for UK 18 year olds by region and country**





## Application rates of 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency

There are 650 parliamentary constituencies in the UK (533 in England, 59 in Scotland, 40 in Wales, and 18 in Northern Ireland). Parliamentary constituencies are much smaller than regions, with typically just over 1,000 18 year olds, and are designed to have a more uniform population size than other geographies. This makes them a particularly suitable smaller geographical unit for reporting application rates.

Figure 7 shows 18 year old application rates in 2017 for all the parliamentary constituencies in the UK. On this map, each parliamentary constituency is shown as a circle, where the size of each circle approximates the size of a constituency's 18 year old population, and their arrangement approximates the geographical locations of the constituencies.

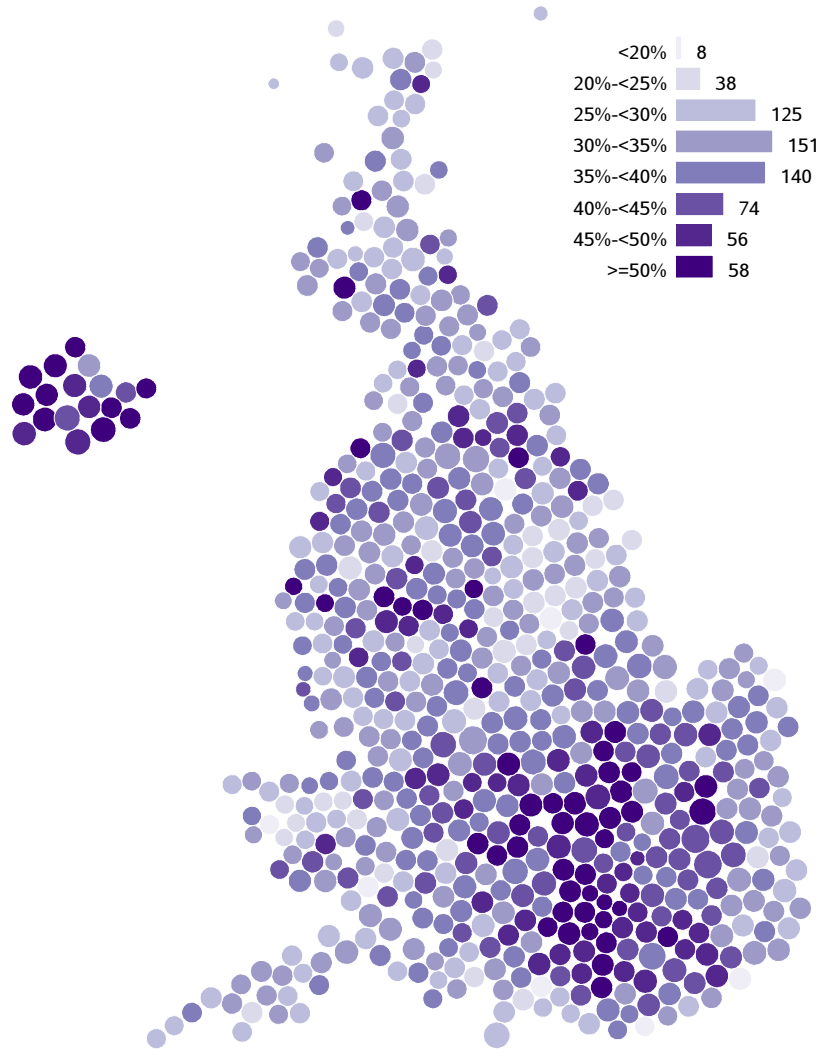
18 year old application rates by constituency vary between 17 per cent and 70 per cent, with those living in constituencies with the highest application rates just over four times more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates. Almost half of constituencies have 18 year old application rates that fall within a ten percentage point band (between 30 and 40 per cent). A small number of constituencies have application rates lower than 20 per cent, or higher than 60 per cent.

The pattern of application rates across constituencies mirrors those seen across regions, with many constituencies in London, the South East, and Northern Ireland having the highest rates, and constituencies in Wales, Scotland, the South West, and the North East having the lowest application rates. However, there is considerable variation across constituencies within regions. In the South East (the region with the largest variation), the application rates range from 17 per cent to 64 per cent, meaning those living in constituencies with the highest application rates in the South East are just under four times more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates in that region. Scotland also has a wide spread of application rates at constituency level, ranging from 22 per cent to 57 per cent. The UCAS 18 year old application rate will understate HE application rates in Scotland, especially for lower application areas, since for the most part, HE provided by Scottish colleges is not included in UCAS data.

Other regions show less variation. In the North East, those living in constituencies with the highest application rates are less than twice as likely to apply as those living in constituencies with the lowest rates (rates in the North East range between 25 per cent and 46 per cent). In Northern Ireland, those living in the constituencies with the highest application rates are around 57 per cent more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates.

In Wales, application rates varied between 19 and 47 per cent, meaning those living in constituencies with the highest application rates were over twice more likely to apply than those living in constituencies with the lowest rates.

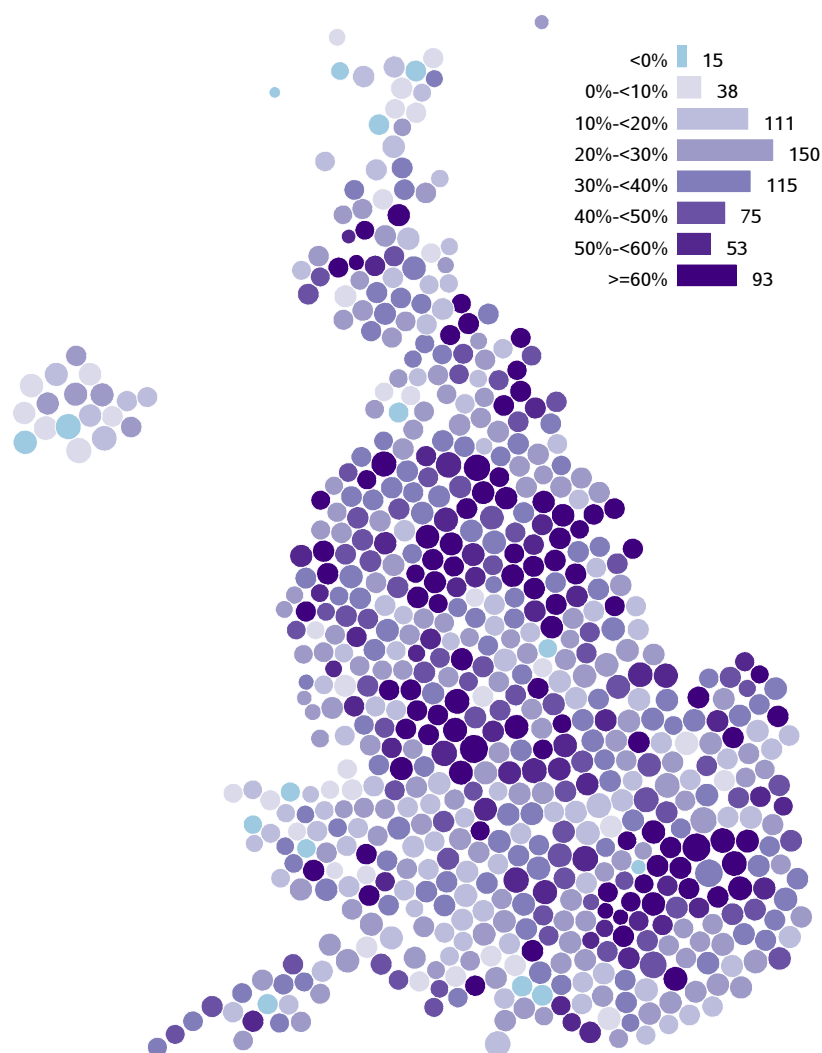
Figure 7 January deadline application rates in 2017 for UK 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency



The relatively small 18 year old population within constituencies (around 1,000) means the changes in application rates are subject to more year to year variation than application rates from areas with larger populations. Looking at changes over a longer period, where underlying changes may be greater, can reduce this (see Figure 8). Between 2006 and 2017, application rates increased in 98 per cent of constituencies. The proportional increase in application rates varied considerably between constituencies, with over a fifth of constituencies having increases of at least 50 per cent, and a small number (around three per cent of constituencies) having application rates that doubled.

The constituency level increases tend to reflect the patterns observed by region, with many constituencies in the north of England and London having larger increases in application rates than constituencies in other parts of the country.

**Figure 8 Proportional change in January deadline application rates between 2006 and 2017 for UK 18 year olds by parliamentary constituency**



## Application rates of 18 year olds by sex

The trend in January deadline application rates for 18 year olds by sex are shown for each country in Figures 9 to 12. The application rates for women are substantially higher than those for men in all countries of the UK.

In England in 2017, 42.7 per cent of 18 year old women applied to higher education, an increase of 0.5 percentage points (1.1 per cent proportionally) since 2016. In comparison, only 31.6 per cent of men applied, a 0.4 percentage point increase from 2016 (1.4 per cent proportionally). The pattern of increases in 2017 result in the percentage point difference in application rates between young women and men remaining at 11.1 percentage points, meaning women were 35 per cent more likely to apply to higher education at age 18 than men – roughly the same as in 2016.

In Northern Ireland, the application rate for 18 year old women in 2017 was 55.6 per cent, a 0.5 percentage point decrease from 2016 (-0.9 per cent proportionally). The application rate for men in 2016 was 39.7 per cent, a decrease of 0.7 percentage points (-1.7 per cent proportionally). These changes in application rate result in women in Northern Ireland being 40 per cent more likely to apply at age 18 than men.

The application rate in Scotland for women in 2017 was the highest recorded at 40.4 per cent, an increase of 0.5 percentage points from 2016 (1.3 per cent proportionally). For men in Scotland, the application rate decreased by 0.4 percentage points for the second successive year to 25.3 per cent (down 1.5 per cent proportionally). The divergence in application rates for men and women means that the proportional difference in applications rates has increased, with women in Scotland now 60 per cent more likely to apply at age 18 than men. For Scotland, there was a significant widening of the gap in application rates between women and men in 2010. This coincided with the integration of the Scottish nursing admissions system (CATCH) into UCAS.

In Wales, the application rate for 18 year old women decreased by 1.2 percentage points to 37.7 per cent (-3.0 per cent proportionally), while for men, the application rate increased slightly by 0.1 percentage points to 25.9 per cent (0.3 per cent proportionally). For men in Wales, the application rate is the highest recorded. These patterns mean that the proportional difference in application rates between women and men fell to 45 per cent – down from a record high of 50 per cent in 2015 and 2016.

Application rates for these single measures of equality can be explored further using the January deadline application rate interactive data explorer, which is available on the UCAS website.

Figure 9 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from England by sex

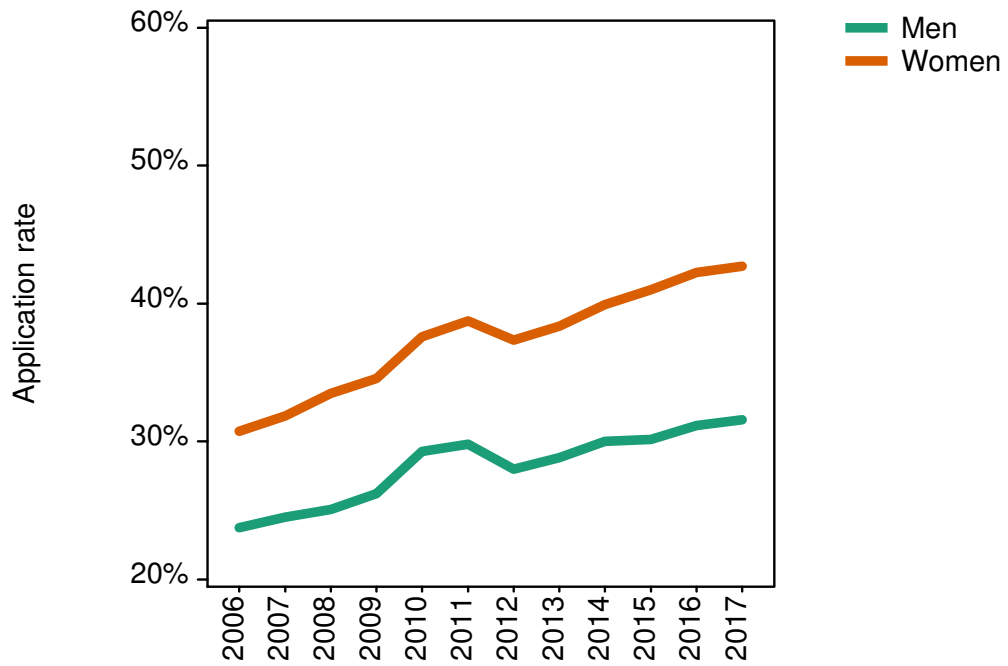


Figure 10 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Northern Ireland by sex

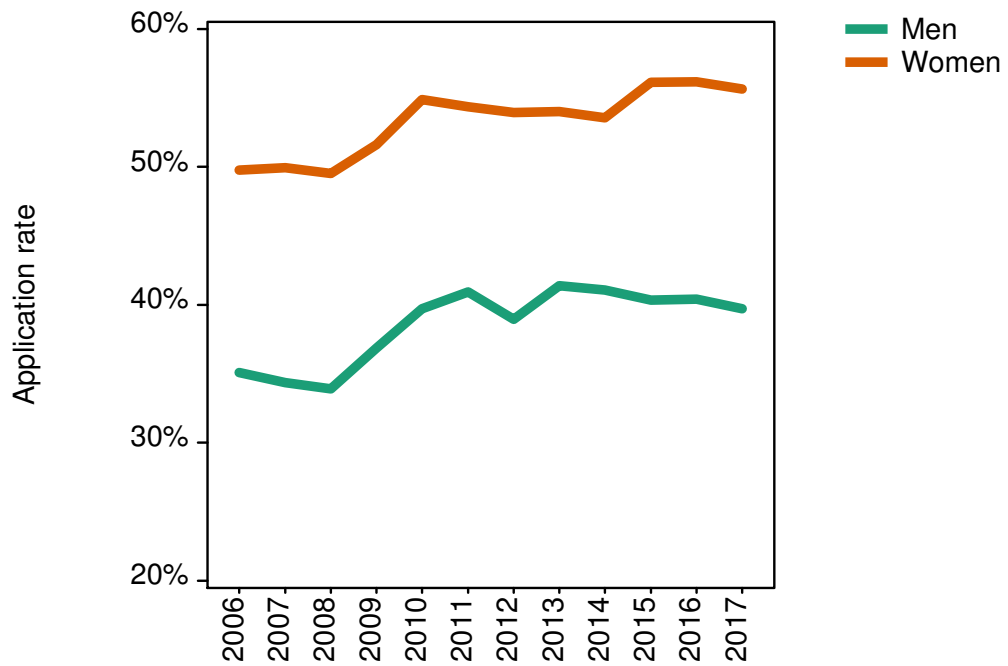


Figure 11 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Scotland by sex

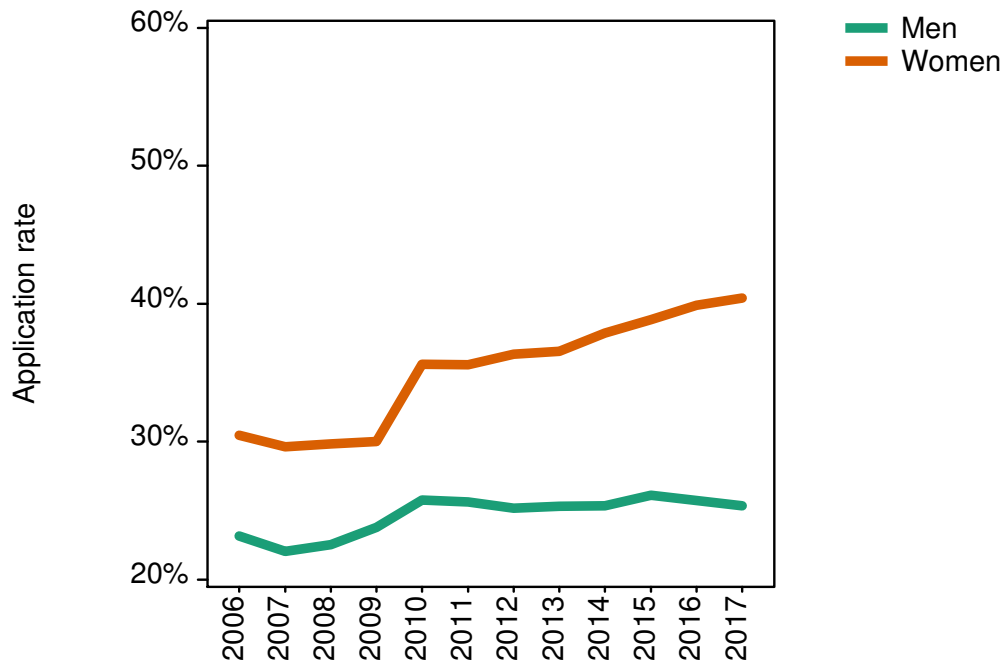
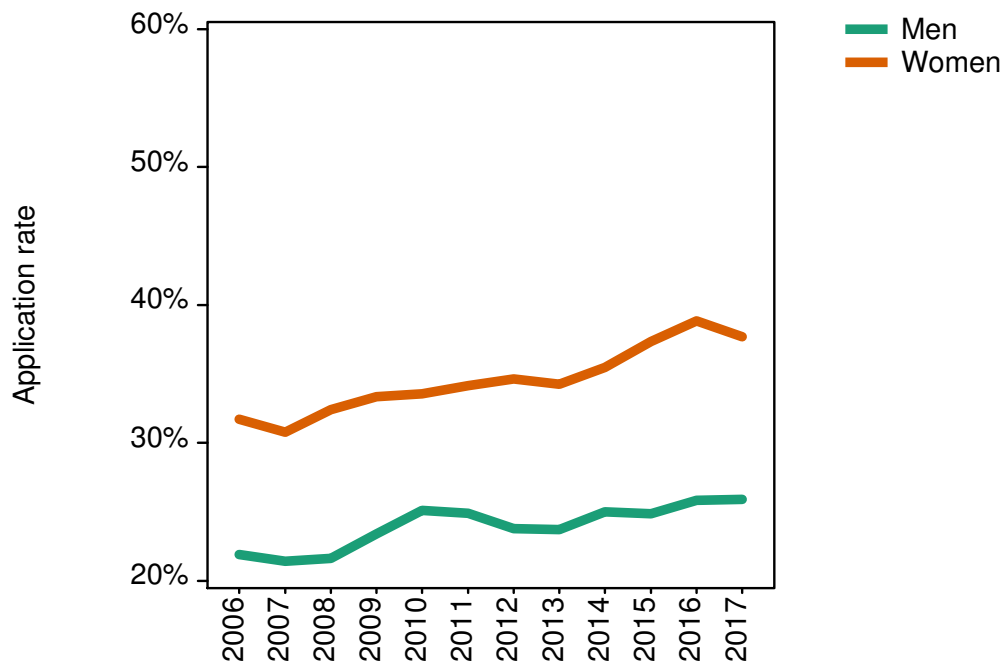


Figure 12 January deadline application rates of 18 year olds from Wales by sex



## Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas (POLAR3)

The POLAR classification, developed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)<sup>1</sup>, classifies small areas across the UK into five groups according to their level of young participation in higher education (entry at age 18 or 19). Each of these groups represents around 20 per cent of young people and are ranked from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation rates, considered as the most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (highest young participation rates, considered most advantaged).

Population estimates have been created for each of the POLAR3 groups using small area population estimates for each of the four UK countries. These have been revised to be consistent with the national level population estimates.

Figure 13 shows the application rates of UK 18 year olds by POLAR3 quintile. In 2017, the application rates increased for all five quintiles, continuing the longer term trends since 2006. In 2017, the application rate for UK 18 year olds from POLAR3 quintile 1 increased by 0.5 percentage points (2.1 per cent proportionally) to 22.1 per cent, by 0.2 percentage points (0.8 per cent proportionally) to 29.2 per cent for those from quintile 2, by 0.3 percentage points (0.8 per cent proportionally) to 35.3 per cent for those from quintile 3, by 0.2 percentage points (0.4 per cent proportionally) to 41.4 per cent for those from quintile 4, and by 0.4 percentage points (0.7 per cent proportionally) to 52.1 per cent for those from quintile 5.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: [www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/POLAR)

**Figure 13 January deadline application rates by POLAR3 quintile for UK 18 year olds (quintile 5 is the most advantaged areas)**

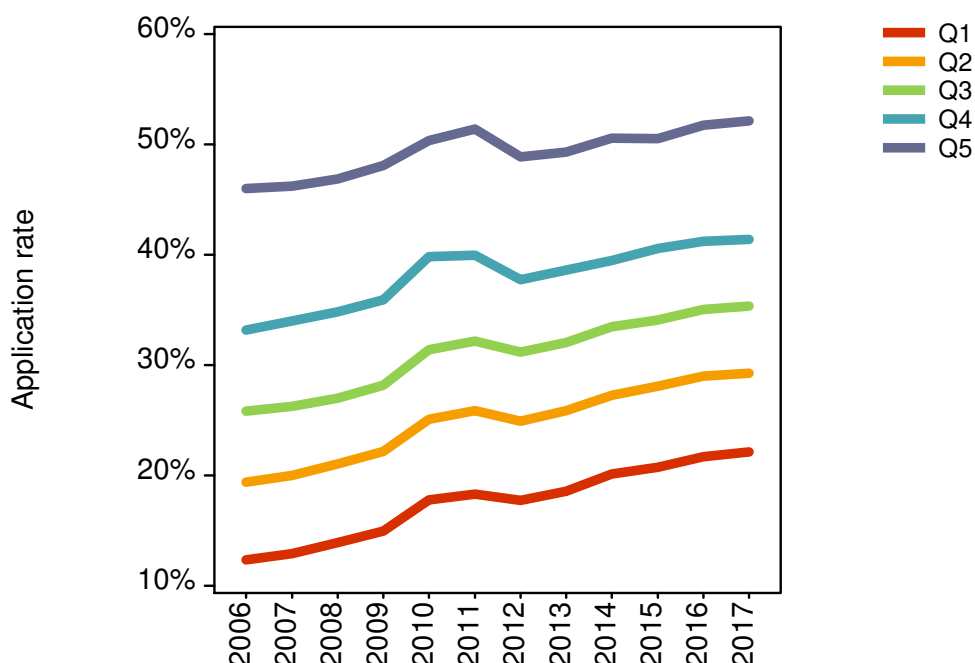


Figure 14 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1). The annual populations in this group are relatively small in Northern Ireland (around 3,500), Scotland (around 5,500), and Wales (around 8,500), so their application rate trends are subject to more year to year variation than for England (typical population size of around 115,000).

All four countries show a substantial increase in application rates from the most disadvantaged group over the period. In England, the application rate of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas has increased from 12.2 per cent in 2006 to 22.5 per cent in 2017. This means that 18 year olds living in the most disadvantaged areas of England were 85 per cent more likely to apply to higher education in 2017 than ten years ago. A similar pattern is evident across other countries of the UK – 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas of Northern Ireland were 30 per cent more likely to apply in 2017 than in 2006, 83 per cent more likely in Scotland, and 45 per cent more likely in Wales.

In England and Scotland, the application rates from disadvantaged areas are at record levels – 22.5 per cent in England and 17.6 per cent in Scotland. In Northern Ireland, the application rate is 24.4 per cent, the second highest after the rate in 2015. The application rate in Wales this year dropped from the previous year’s record high, to 19.7 per cent.



In 2017, the application rate from disadvantaged areas increased by 0.5 percentage points in England and 1.8 percentage points in Scotland. In Northern Ireland, the application rate remained almost constant, and in Wales, the rate decreased by 0.7 percentage points. These changes mean that 18 year olds from disadvantaged areas in England are 2.2 per cent more likely to have applied by the January deadline in 2017 compared with 2016, 11.6 per cent more likely in Scotland, and 3.3 per cent less likely in Wales.

The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) are shown in Figure 15. The annual populations in this group are relatively small in Northern Ireland (around 7,000), Scotland (around 18,000), and Wales (around 6,000), so their application rate trends are subject to more year to year variation than for England (typical population size of around 135,000).

The proportional changes in the application rates for this group over the period are much smaller than for quintile 1 – 15 per cent in England, eight per cent in Northern Ireland, and seven per cent in Scotland and Wales. In 2017, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in England increased by 0.5 percentage points (1.1 per cent proportionally), and in Northern Ireland by 0.2 percentage points (0.4 per cent proportionally). The increase for England means the application rate for the most advantaged areas in 2017 is the highest recorded. The application rate has decreased by 0.5 percentage points in Scotland (-1.1 per cent proportionally), and by 1.4 percentage points in Wales (-2.8 per cent proportionally).

In 2006, the application rates from the most advantaged areas in all countries were between 3.1 and 4.8 times as great as the application rates from the most disadvantaged areas. Since then, these differences have reduced substantially such that in 2017, those from the most advantaged areas were between 2.3 and 2.6 times more likely to apply than those from the most disadvantaged areas. This reduction was mainly due to an increase in the application rate in the most disadvantaged areas.

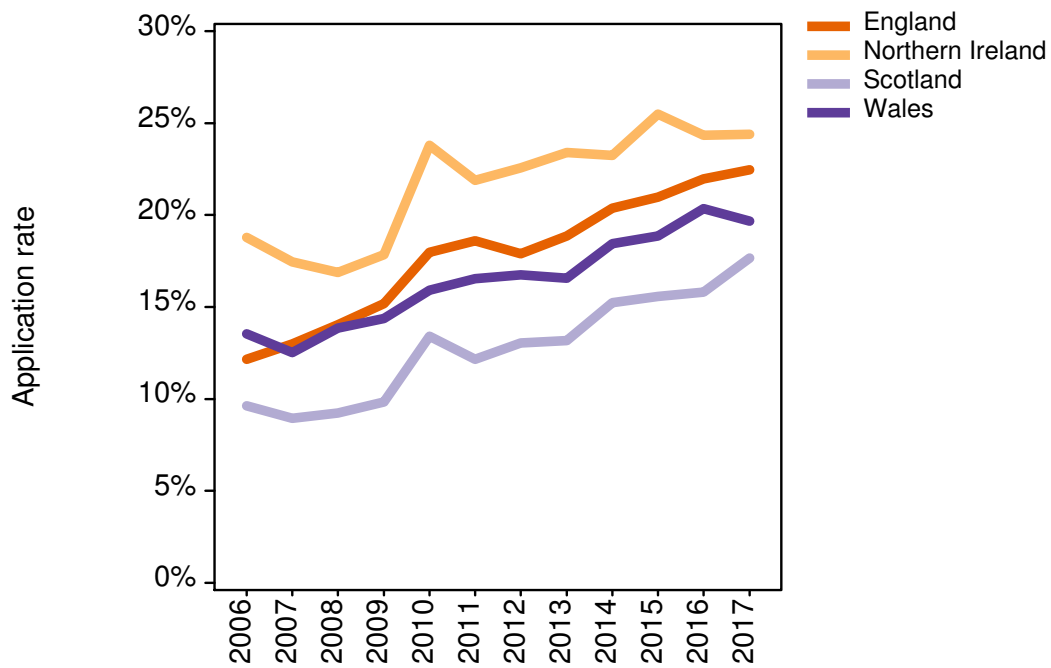
In England, the ratio between application rates from advantaged and disadvantaged areas was 2.3 in 2017, down from 2.4 in 2016. In the two years where the difference did not reduce compared to the previous cycle, the application rate for the most disadvantaged areas increased, but the percentage point increase in the application rate for the most advantaged areas was larger than that seen in the most disadvantaged areas.

Application rates for these single measures of equality can be explored further using the January deadline application rate interactive data explorer, which is available on the UCAS website.

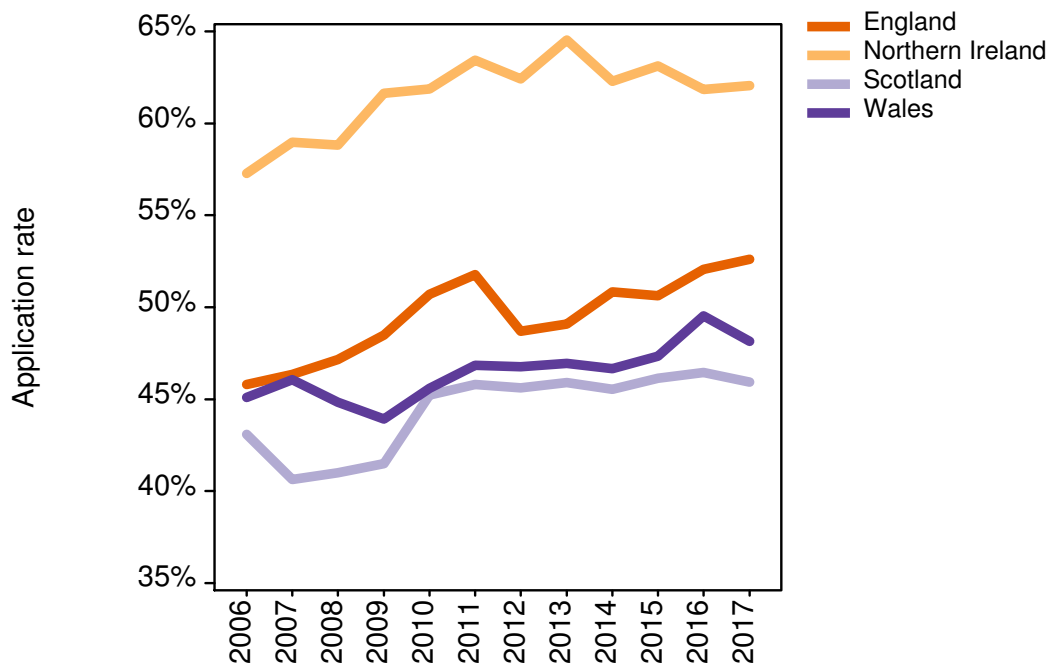
**Table 14/15 January deadline application rates for 18 year olds from POLAR3 Q1 (most disadvantaged areas), POLAR3 Q5 (most advantaged areas), and Q5:Q1 application rate ratio**

<b>POLAR3 Q1</b>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
England	12.2%	13.0%	14.0%	15.2%	18.0%	18.6%	17.9%	18.9%	20.4%	21.0%	22.0%	22.5%
Northern Ireland	18.8%	17.5%	16.9%	17.8%	23.8%	21.9%	22.6%	23.4%	23.3%	25.5%	24.4%	24.4%
Scotland	9.6%	8.9%	9.2%	9.8%	13.4%	12.1%	13.0%	13.2%	15.2%	15.6%	15.9%	17.6%
Wales	13.6%	12.5%	13.9%	14.4%	15.9%	16.6%	16.8%	16.5%	18.4%	18.9%	20.4%	19.7%
UK	12.3%	12.9%	13.9%	15.0%	17.8%	18.3%	17.7%	18.6%	20.1%	20.7%	21.7%	22.1%
<b>POLAR3 Q5</b>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
England	45.8%	46.3%	47.2%	48.5%	50.7%	51.8%	48.7%	49.1%	50.8%	50.6%	52.1%	52.6%
Northern Ireland	57.3%	58.9%	58.8%	61.6%	61.8%	63.4%	62.3%	64.6%	62.3%	63.2%	61.9%	62.1%
Scotland	43.1%	40.6%	41.0%	41.5%	45.2%	45.8%	45.6%	45.9%	45.6%	46.1%	46.5%	45.9%
Wales	45.1%	46.1%	44.8%	43.9%	45.6%	46.8%	46.8%	46.9%	46.7%	47.3%	49.5%	48.1%
UK	46.0%	46.2%	46.8%	48.1%	50.3%	51.4%	48.9%	49.3%	50.5%	50.5%	51.8%	52.1%
<b>Ratio Q5:Q1</b>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
England	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.3
Northern Ireland	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.5	2.6	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.5	2.5
Scotland	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.2	3.4	3.8	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.6
Wales	3.3	3.7	3.2	3.1	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4
UK	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.4

**Figure 14 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 1)**



**Figure 15 January deadline application rates by country for 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 5)**



## Application rates of 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas in Scotland (SIMD)

Figure 16 shows the application rates for Scottish 18 year olds by area-based background using the latest version of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD 2016).<sup>2</sup> SIMD ranks small geographical areas in Scotland by their relative level of deprivation across a range of measures, which are used to form five groups with approximately equal population sizes. Not all higher education providers in Scotland use UCAS, meaning there is a substantial section of provision (mostly offered through further education colleges) that is not included in UCAS' figures. This means these entry rates will be lower than the total entry rate to higher education.

Application rates for Scottish 18 year olds have increased over the period for all five quintiles. The application rate for Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas increased from 10.0 per cent in 2006 to 17.0 per cent in 2017. This means that Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas are 70 per cent more likely to apply in 2017 than eleven years ago. This greatly contrasts with the much smaller change in the application rate from the most advantaged areas over time, which increased from 48.3 per cent in 2006 to 49.5 per cent in 2017, a proportional increase of 2.5 per cent.

In 2017, the application rate for Scottish 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas increased by 1.1 percentage points (6.6 per cent proportionally). The application rate from the most advantaged areas decreased by 2.5 percentage points (-4.9 per cent proportionally).

The application rates for Scottish 18 year olds in the intermediate SIMD quintiles changed as follows: SIMD quintile 2 increased by 0.2 percentage points (0.7 per cent proportionally) to 23.8 per cent and SIMD quintile 3 grew by 1.1 percentage points (3.6 per cent proportionally) to 31.7 per cent. SIMD quintile 4 decreased slightly in 2017 by 0.2 percentage points (0.5 per cent proportionally) to 39.1 per cent.

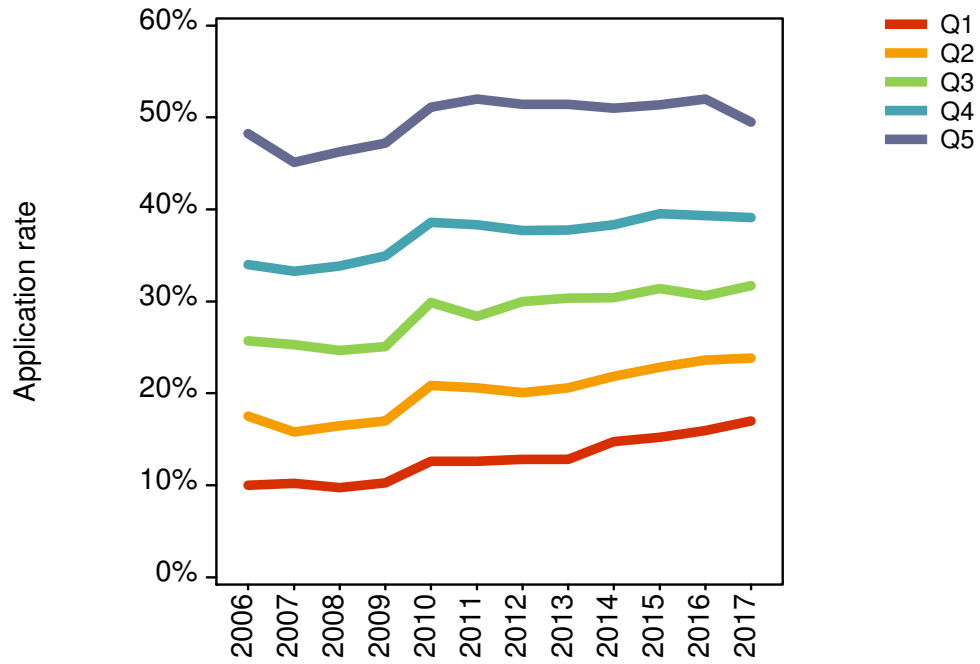
This has resulted in a decrease in the gap between the application rates of the most advantaged and most disadvantaged 18 year olds in Scotland, dropping to a ratio of 1.9, the lowest value recorded.

Application rates for these single measures of equality can be explored further using the January deadline application rate interactive data explorer, which is available on the UCAS website.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD)

Figure 16 January deadline application rates by SIMD quintile for Scottish 18 year olds (SIMD quintile 5 is the most advantaged areas)



## **Application rates of English 18 year olds from disadvantaged and advantaged areas by sex**

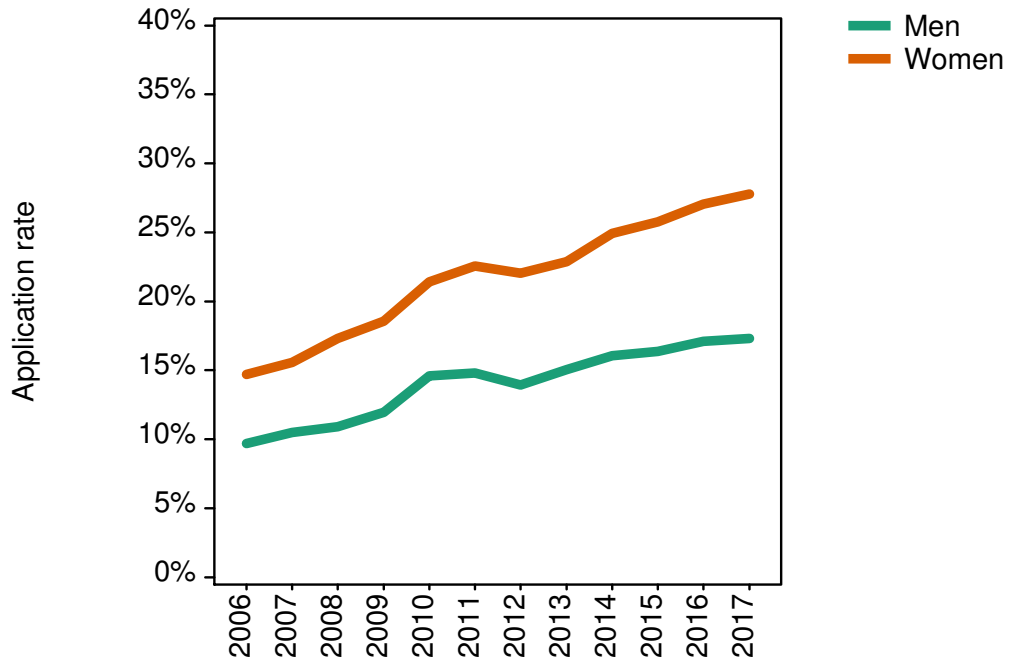
Figure 17 shows the application rates of 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas (quintile 1) in England, defined using the POLAR3 classification. The application rates of 18 year olds from the most advantaged areas (quintile 5) in England are shown in Figure 18. The population sizes by background and sex in the other countries of the UK are much smaller and this means application rates are more variable year to year.

In England, 18 year old women are much more likely to apply to higher education than men in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas. The proportional differences are largest in the most disadvantaged areas where, in 2017, women were 60 per cent more likely to apply, compared with advantaged areas where they were 21 per cent more likely to apply.

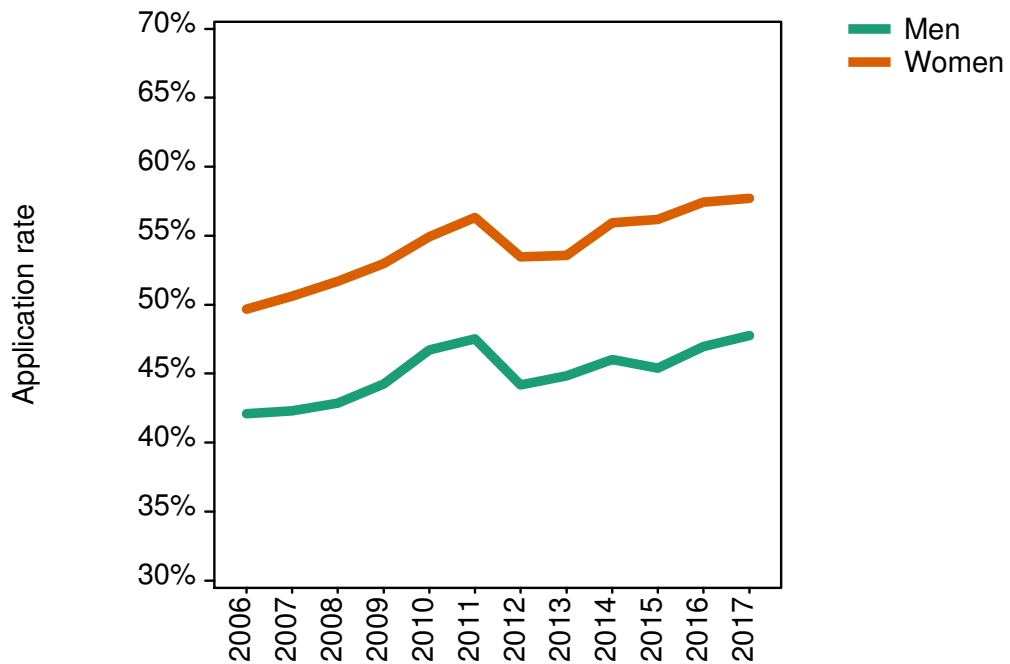
In disadvantaged areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old men increased by 0.2 percentage points (1.3 per cent proportionally), and by 0.7 percentage points (2.7 per cent proportionally) for women. In advantaged areas in England, the application rate for 18 year old men increased by 0.8 percentage points (1.7 per cent proportionally), and by 0.3 percentage points (0.5 per cent proportionally) for women.

Application rates for these single measures of equality can be explored further using the January deadline application rate interactive data explorer, which is available on the UCAS website.

**Figure 17 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most disadvantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 1) by sex**



**Figure 18 January deadline application rates for English 18 year olds (most advantaged areas, POLAR3 quintile 5) by sex**



## Application rates of UK 18 year olds by qualifications

Entry to higher education is often determined by the type and strength of the qualifications held by an applicant. Most 18 year olds who apply to HE through UCAS do so while studying for the qualifications required for entry, and so apply with their qualifications pending.

The type of qualifications being studied and the predicted grades are provided by each applicant when they apply. This information on pending qualifications is used to assess the trends in application rates for 18 year olds according to the type of qualifications they were studying on application. A levels are the most widely studied qualification among UK 18 year old applicants from the UK – around 70 per cent have at least one A level pending upon application. Other qualifications that are commonly studied by this group are BTECs, Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers (abbreviated to SQAs for Scottish Qualifications Authority), and the International Baccalaureate (IB). Applicants are often studying combinations of qualifications, most frequently a combination of A levels and BTECs.

Applicants are grouped by the combination of the pending qualifications they were recorded to be studying for. Applicants studying for three or more A levels, and not studying for another of the other three qualification types, are reported in the 'A level only' group. Applicants studying Level 3 BTECs (to the equivalent amount of three A levels) but not studying any of the other three qualification types, are assigned to the 'BTEC only' group. Applicants studying for at least three Scottish Highers or Scottish Advanced Highers are in the 'SQA only' group. Applicants studying for the International Baccalaureate and not studying for any of the other qualification types are in the 'IB only' group. Applicants studying for a combination of A levels and BTECs (to the equivalent amount of three A levels) are reported in the 'A level & BTEC' group. Applicants who are not assigned to any of these groups are not reported – in 2017, these accounted for around 15 per cent of UK 18 year old applicants.

Figures 19a and 19b show the proportion of the UK 18 year old population that applied, split by qualification group. The application rate for the A level only group are shown on a separate graph, as the application rate for this group is much higher than for the others. The application rate for the A level group has increased during the period from its lowest recorded rate of 22.2 per cent in 2012, to reach a record high of 23.6 per cent in 2017.

The BTEC only group is the next largest. Between 2012 and 2015, the application rate for this group increased proportionally by 60 per cent from 2.4 per cent to a high of 3.9 per cent. While the application rate remained constant last year, in 2017 it has fallen by 0.3 percentage points to 3.6 per cent (eight per cent proportionally). However, this is still 46 per cent higher than its lowest recorded rate (in the period) from 2012.



Applying while studying for both A levels and BTECs has become more common. The application rate for this group has increased in each cycle, from 0.6 per cent in 2010 to 1.7 per cent in 2016. In 2017, the application rate remained constant at 1.7 per cent, the first time that no increase has been recorded for this qualification group.

Young people in Scotland applying to HE via UCAS generally hold, or are studying for, Scottish Highers or Advanced Highers (SQA awards). The proportion of UK 18 year olds applying with SQAs has remained stable since 2010, ranging between 2.1 and 2.3 per cent. In 2017, 2.2 per cent of UK 18 year olds applied with SQAs.

The smallest qualification group in this report is the International Baccalaureate (IB) only group. The proportion of UK 18 year olds applying while studying for the IB in 2017 was 0.4 per cent, and has remained between 0.3 and 0.4 per cent during the period.

**Figure 19a Application rates for UK 18 year olds by type of qualifications being studied on application (A level only)**

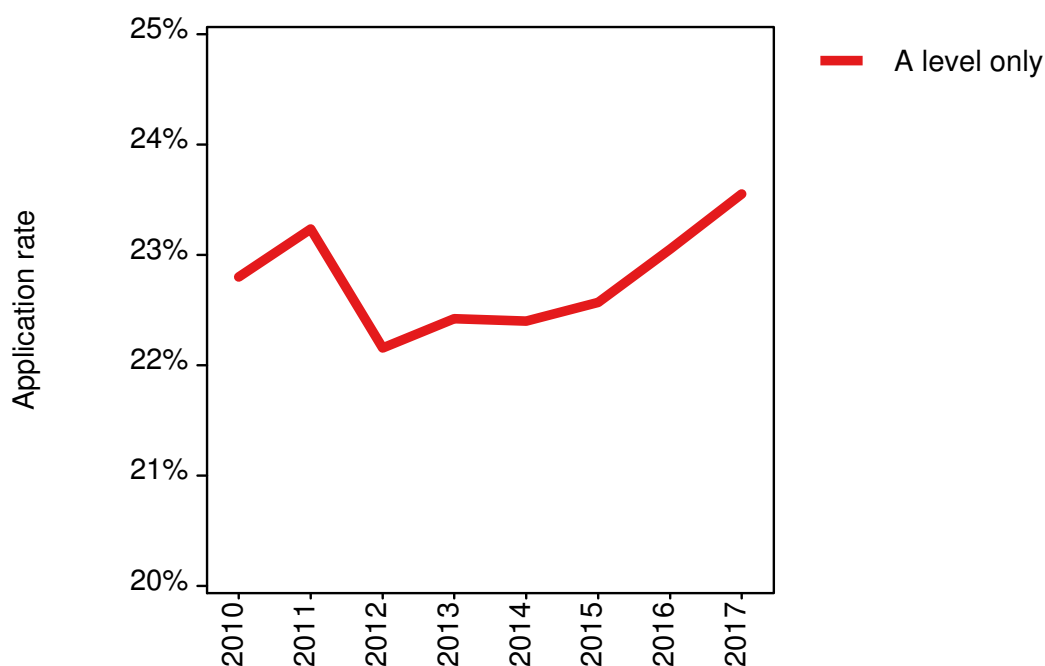
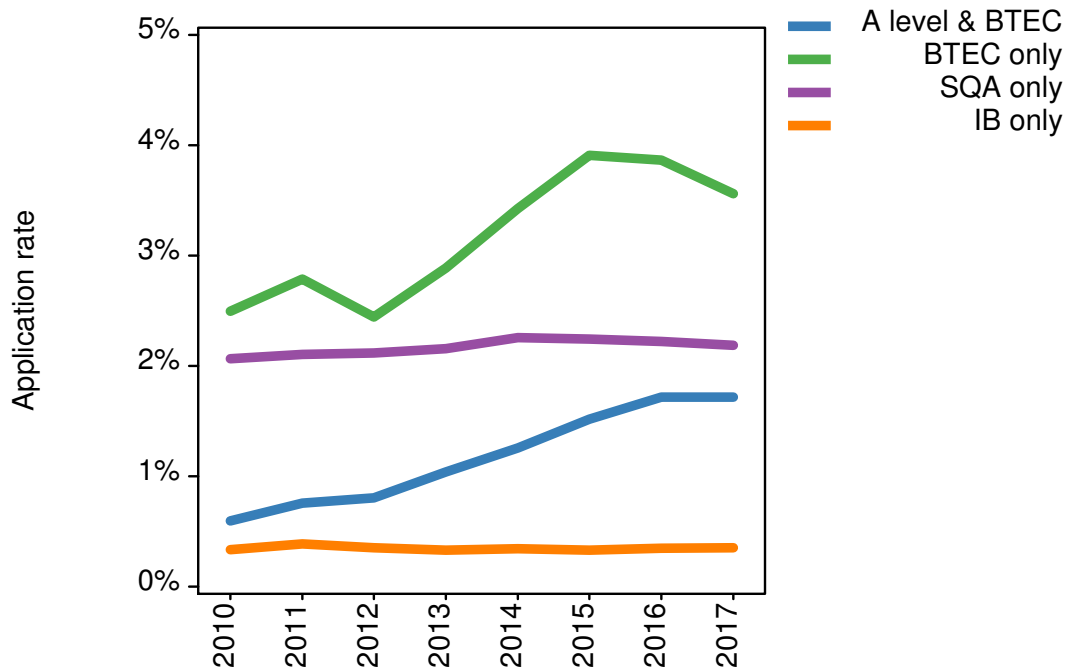


Figure 19b Application rates for UK 18 year olds by type of qualifications being studied on application (excluding the A level only group)



## 19 year old 'first-time' application rates by country

After 18 year old application rates, the next largest age specific application rate from the UK is for those aged 19. This rate is more difficult to interpret since it is influenced by the application and acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. Whereas 18 year olds are usually applying for higher education for the first time, 19 year olds typically fall into one of two categories – applying for the first time or reapplying after having already made an application aged 18.

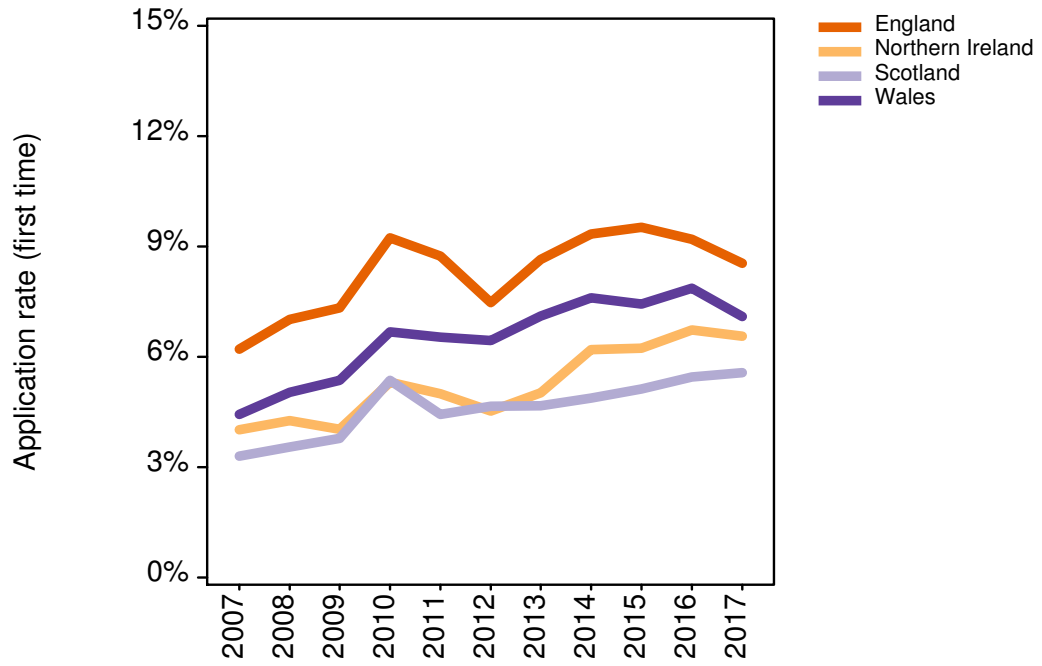
The 'first time' application rates at age 19 only include those applicants who did not apply in the previous cycle. Unlike the application rate for 19 year olds as a whole, they are not directly influenced by the acceptance rate of 18 year olds in the previous cycle. However, they may be sensitive to changes in the application rate at age 18, since if the application rate at age 18 increases substantially, it may result in a smaller pool of potential applicants to apply for the first time at age 19. Figure 20 shows the 'first time' 19 year old application rates. Generally, this application rate increased between 2007 and 2010 in all four countries, and then fell in 2011.

First time 19 year old application rates are higher in England than elsewhere in the UK. The first time application rate in England reached a peak of 9.5 per cent in 2015, before dropping for the first time since 2012 the following year. In 2017, the first time application rate for 19 year olds continued to decrease, falling by 0.6 percentage points to 8.5 per cent.

In Wales, the rate has generally been increasing over time. It reached a high of 7.9 per cent in 2016, but this year decreased by 0.8 percentage points to 7.1 per cent. A similar trend is shown for Northern Ireland, where in 2016 a high of 6.7 per cent was recorded. In 2017, there was a small drop in the 19 year old first time application rate to 6.6 per cent.

In Scotland – where the measure will not include most demand for higher education provided at further education colleges – the first time 19 year old application rate has been increasing gradually over the period, apart from an elevated demand in 2010, which reversed in the following cycle. The rate in 2016 increased by 0.3 percentage points to reach 5.5 per cent, passing the previous high in 2010. In 2017, the rate increased again (up 0.1 percentage points) to 5.6 per cent.

Figure 20 First time application rates of 19 year olds by country



## Cohort demand for higher education covering 18 and 19 year olds

Applicant decisions about whether to apply at age 18 or 19 can vary from year to year. Material changes in the balance of applying at age 18 versus age 19 can make it more difficult to interpret trends for single age groups as an indicator of demand from young people as a whole.

One measure that is not influenced by the decision to apply at age 18 or age 19 is the cohort application rate. Each cohort includes all young people aged 18 in a particular academic year. The cohort application rate is the proportion of that cohort that applies for higher education either at age 18 or, a year later, at age 19 – people who apply in both years are only counted once. With this construction, the rate is not affected if applicants decided to apply at age 18 instead of 19, or if changes in the acceptance rate of 18 year olds leads to more or fewer reapplicants the next year.

To calculate cohort rates, an additional year is needed so the cohort has had the opportunity to apply at age 19 as well as age 18. In this report, we can look at cohort demand up to and including the cohort that was aged 18 in 2016 ('the 2016 cohort') and applied for the first time aged 18 in 2016, or the first time aged 19 in 2017.

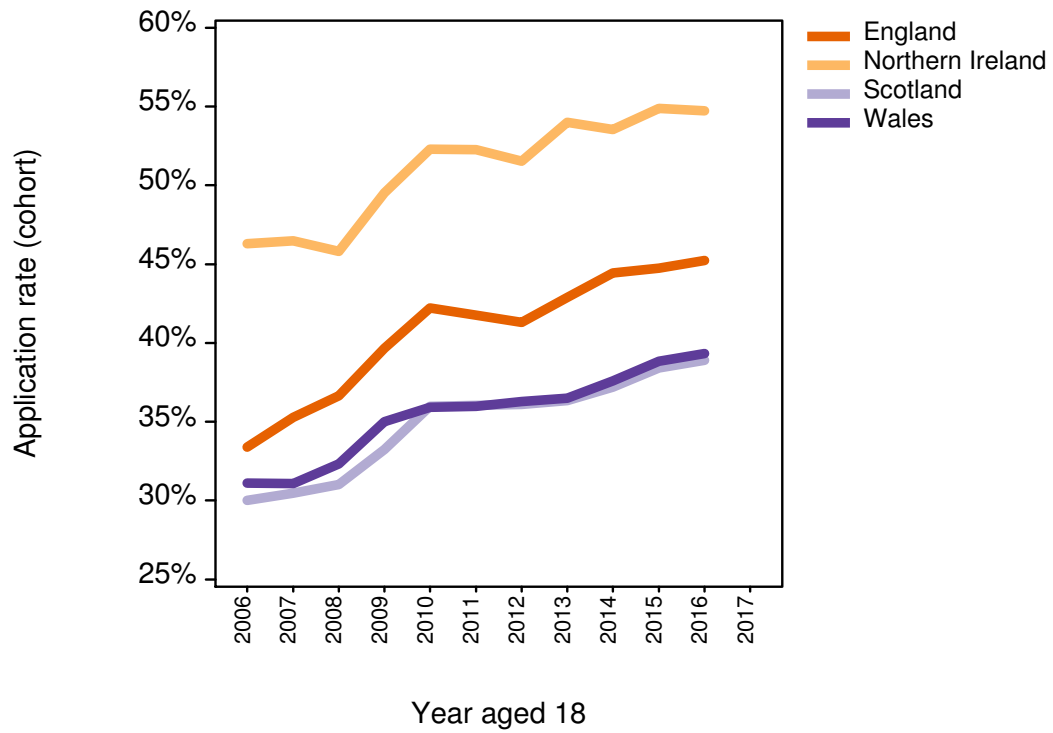
The proportion of the English young population that applied for higher education by the age of 19 (Figure 21) increased steadily from 33.4 per cent for those aged 18 in 2006, to 42.2 per cent for those aged 18 in 2010. There were small decreases in the cohort rate of 0.5 percentage points for both the 2011 cohort (where 19 year old applicants experienced higher and more variable fees for the first time), and for the 2012 cohort (where 18 year old applicants experienced higher and more variable fees for the first time). For the cohort aged 18 in 2013, the cohort rate increased by 1.6 percentage points, more than reversing the decreases in the rate seen for the previous two cohorts in England to 42.9 per cent. The cohorts from 2012 onwards were each subject to higher fee arrangements, whether they applied aged 18 or aged 19. The cohort application rate for these cohorts has been increasing and reached 44.7 per cent for the 2015 cohort, the highest recorded at the time. The increase for the 2015 cohort was 0.3 percentage points, around one fifth the size of the increases for the 2013 and 2014 cohorts. In 2016, the cohort entry rate increased by 0.5 percentage points to a record high of 45.2 per cent.

A similar pattern was seen in Northern Ireland, leading to an application rate of 54.0 per cent for the cohort who were aged 18 in 2013. For those aged 18 in 2014, the cohort rate fell by 0.5 percentage points to 53.5 per cent. The application rate for those aged 18 in 2015 increased to 54.9 per cent, the highest recorded. The cohort entry rate decreased slightly in 2016 to 54.7 per cent.

In Wales and Scotland, cohort application rates are lower than elsewhere (the Scottish rate will not include applications to HE in many further education colleges in Scotland), but have increased over the period. The application rates for the cohorts aged 18 in 2016 both rose by 0.5 percentage points from the previous cohorts, to

38.9 percent in Scotland and 39.3 per cent in Wales. These increases mean the 2016 cohort rates are the highest recorded for Wales and Scotland.

**Figure 21 Cohort application rates by age 19 by country**



## Reapplication rates of previously unplaced 18 year old UK applicants

Almost all 18 year old applicants from the UK apply through UCAS for the first time. At the end of the application cycle, most of these applicants will have been placed. A minority of these applicants – typically 15 to 20 per cent – will be unplaced at the end of the cycle.

Some of these unplaced 18 year old applicants reapply the following cycle, aged 19. The proportion of the unplaced applicants who reapply in this way is the reapplication rate. Trends in this statistic can indicate both the extent of remaining demand for entry into higher education at the end of the original cycle, together with how applicants view the relative attractions of entering higher education in one cycle compared to the next.

Figure 22 shows the reapplication rates for unplaced 18 year olds by UK country of domicile. The rates are referenced by the cycle in which they were unplaced – for example, the proportion of unplaced 18 year old applicants from the 2016 cycle who reapply aged 19 in the 2017 cycle is shown against 2016.

The 2017 cycle reapplication rates for those aged 18 in 2016 fell for all UK countries. In England, the reapplication rates decreased by 3.4 percentage points to 42.7 per cent, Northern Ireland fell by 2.4 percentage points to 36.3 per cent, Scotland had a small decrease of 0.4 percentage points to 34.8 per cent, and Wales a larger drop of 5.9 percentage points to 37.7 per cent. The reapplication rates from those aged 18 in 2016 are within eight percentage points of the values from those aged 18 in 2010 in each country, and are still substantially higher than the reapplication rates from those aged 18 in 2006 and 2007.

Figure 22 January deadline reapplication rates for UK 18 year olds unplaced in the previous cycle





## Interaction between the acceptance rate of 18 year olds and the reapplication rate

The acceptance rate for 18 year old applicants has varied from cycle to cycle, with part of this variation (prior to the 2015 cycle) relating to the number of places effectively available in higher education. Consequently, it is likely that the reapplication rate and the acceptance rate in the previous cycle may be associated.

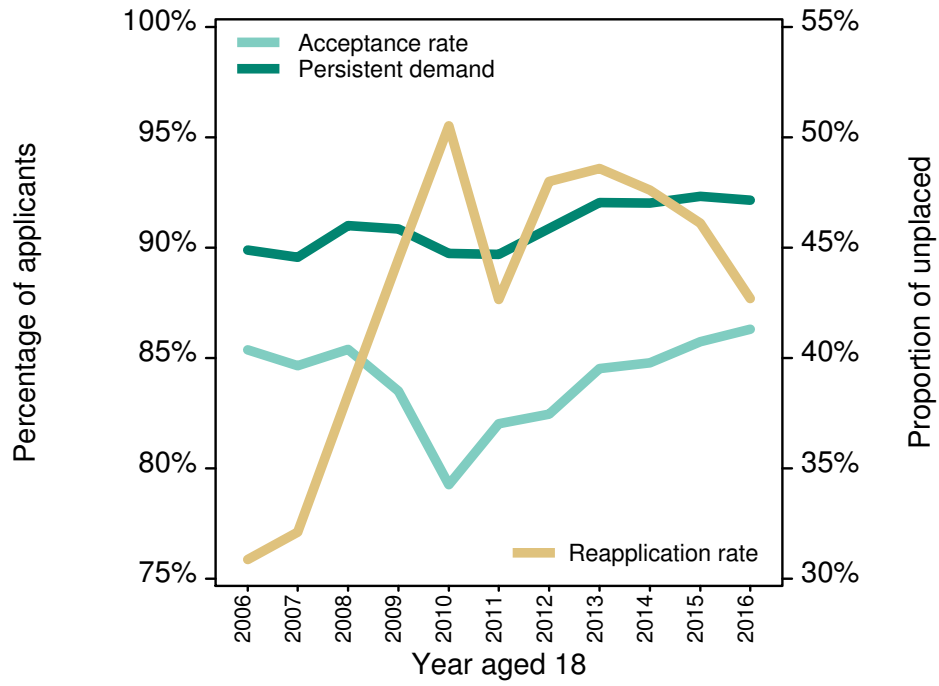
Figure 23 shows the acceptance rate for English 18 year old applicants in each cycle (left axis) and the reapplication rate of those who are not accepted (right axis, shown against the cycle in which they were unplaced). Both the acceptance rate and reapplication rate have varied considerably across the period. However, a combination of these measures (the proportion of 18 year old applicants who are either accepted or immediately reapply the next cycle) gives a statistic that is more constant. This measure describes the proportion of applicants who either translate their application into entry or, if not, have the persistence of demand to immediately seek to do so the next cycle.

This statistic can be interpreted as a measure of degree of persistence in demand for higher education among those who have already applied. The stability of this statistic at around 90 per cent of applicants over the measured period (despite large fluctuations in application, acceptance, and reapplication rates) is suggestive that a steady proportion of those 18 year olds who apply will tend to persist in their applications to higher education. In particular, any increase in the 18 year old acceptance rate towards 90 per cent may lead to fewer 19 year old reapplicants.

However, 18 year olds from the 2012 and 2013 cycles experienced increased acceptance rates and increased reapplication rates. This is especially notable for 18 year olds who applied in 2013, where the acceptance rate increased by 2.1 percentage points to 84.5 per cent, yet the reapplication rate of the smaller unplaced population also increased slightly (to 48.6 per cent), and is substantially higher than when the acceptance rate was last at this level (2009, acceptance rate 83.5 per cent, reapplication rate 44.5 per cent). This increase in both the acceptance rate and the reapplication rate caused the measure of persistent demand to rise to 92 per cent for 18 year olds who applied in 2013.

In 2014, acceptance rates for 18 year olds increased, and reapplication rates for 18 year olds decreased. In 2015, the pattern of increasing acceptance rate of 18 year olds and decreasing reapplication rate continued. For 18 year old applicants in 2016, 86.3 per cent were accepted that cycle (+0.6 percentage points), while 42.7 per cent of those unplaced reapplied in 2017 (-3.4 percentage points). This meant the persistent demand for 18 year olds who applied in 2016 decreased very slightly to 92.2 per cent.

**Figure 23 Acceptance rates, reapplication rates, and persistent demand**



## Application rates by age

Interpreting application rate trends as a measure of demand for higher education for age groups older than age 18 is more difficult than it is for those aged 18. The link to the background population is less clear (for example, a large and changing proportion will already have higher education qualifications), and the applicants themselves will, in many cases, have had previous opportunities to apply. In addition, a lower proportion of total applicants in older age groups apply by the January deadline, making January deadline rates a less complete measure of demand, and this proportion has changed over time.

Figures 24 to 27 show the application rates for all age groups (except the 18 and 19 year old age groups which have been reported earlier) from each country in turn. Application rates vary substantially across the age groups – for example, in England 20 year olds have an application rate over twice that of 21 year olds, ten times greater than 25 to 29 year olds, and 75 times greater than 40 to 60 year olds. To accommodate this range, and to allow the assessment of proportional changes, the rates are shown on a logarithmic axis.

In England, the rates in 2017 fell for all age groups aged 20 and older. The magnitude of these decreases in application rates is comparable to the large fall in 2012 for all of these age groups. The largest proportional decrease was for the 30 to 39 age group (-24.6 per cent proportionally), and the smallest decrease in application rates was for 20 year olds, who decreased by 0.4 percentage points to 3.3 per cent (-10.4 per cent proportionally). Despite these falls, the application rates in 2017 for these age groups were between 32 and 83 per cent higher than at the start of the period.

In Northern Ireland, the application rates increased for those aged 20 and 23. For those aged 20, the rates in 2017 were at their highest recorded level. Application rates fell for all other age groups shown here, with the largest decrease seen in those aged 24 (-24.8 per cent proportionally).

Scotland differed from the rest of the UK, with application rates increasing for the majority of age groups. New highs were recorded in 2017 for those aged 20, and for the 30 to 39 and 40 to 60 age groups. The application rate for 21 and 22 year olds remained similar to last year, and fell slightly for those in all other age groups.

Wales was similar to England with regards to application rates from older age groups, with the application rates decreasing for all age groups in 2017. The largest decrease was seen for those aged 23 (-22.6 per cent proportionally).

Figure 24 January deadline application rates from England by age

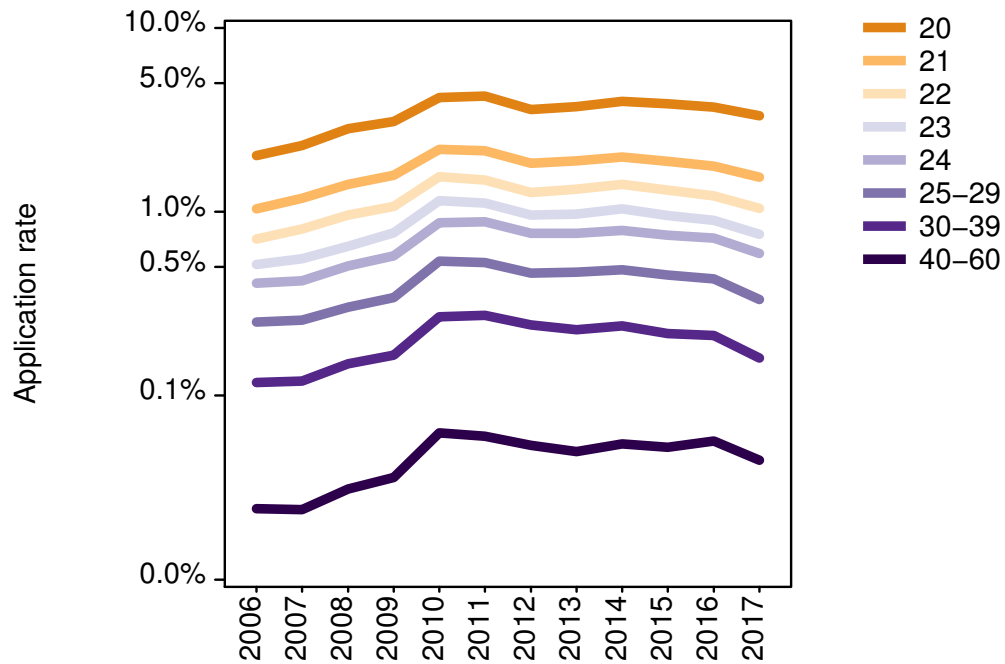


Figure 25 January deadline application rates from Northern Ireland by age

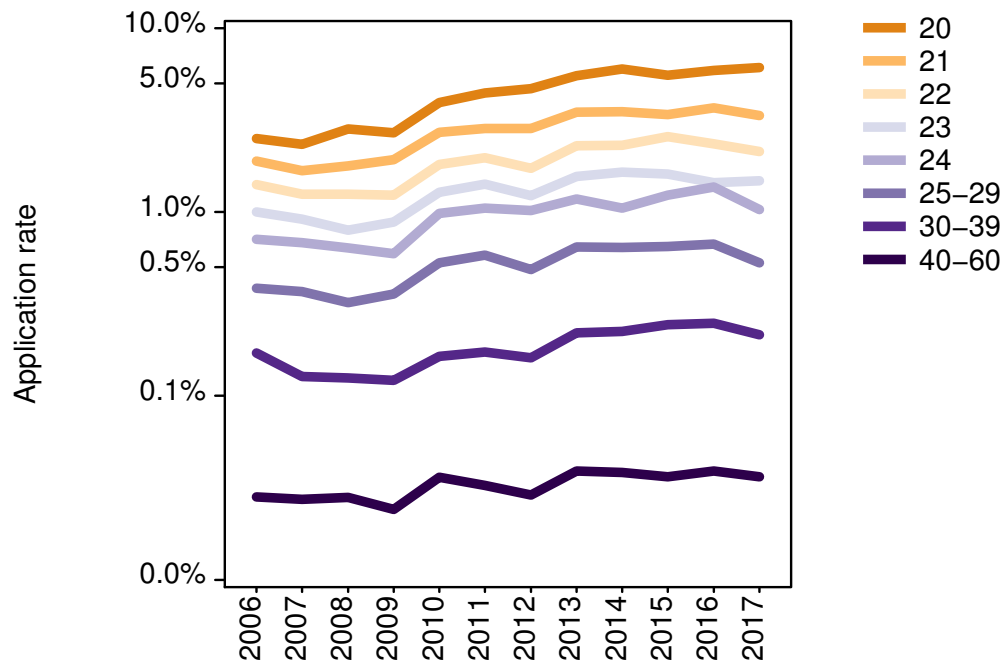


Figure 26 January deadline application rates from Scotland by age

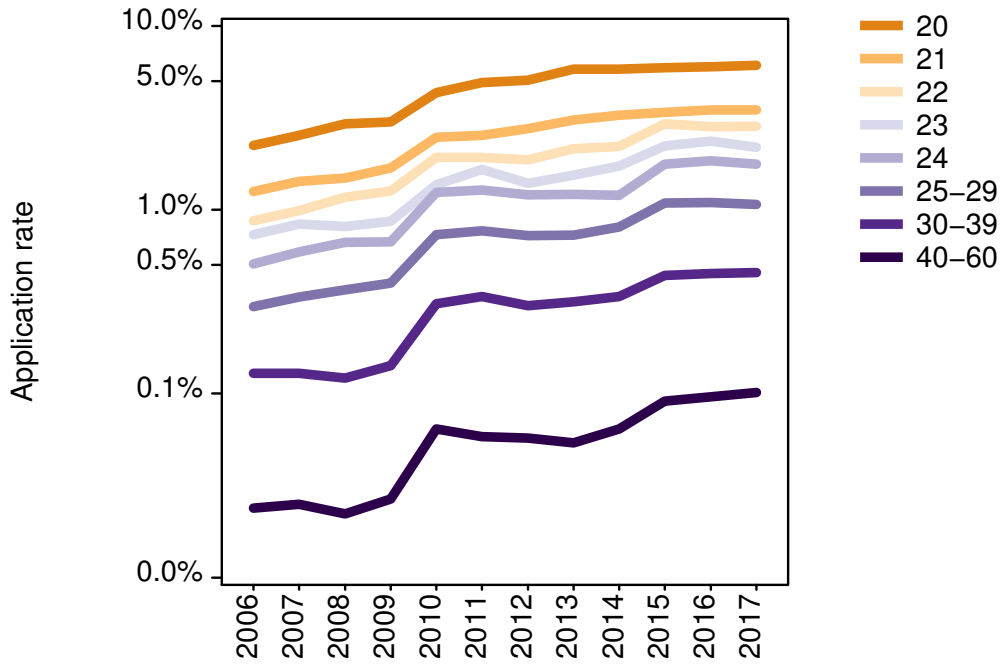


Figure 27 January deadline application rates from Wales by age

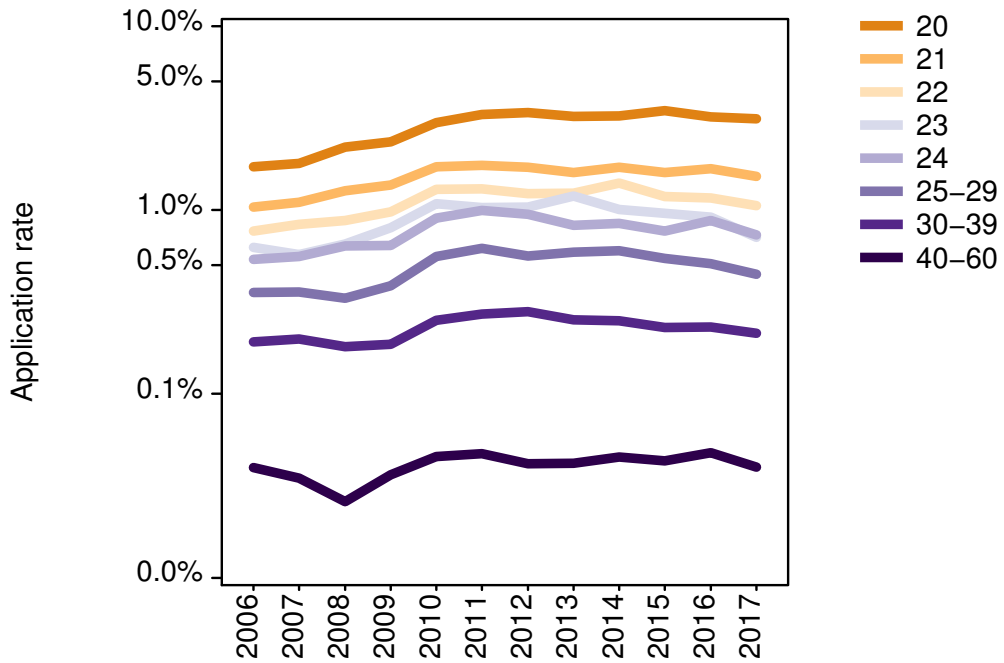
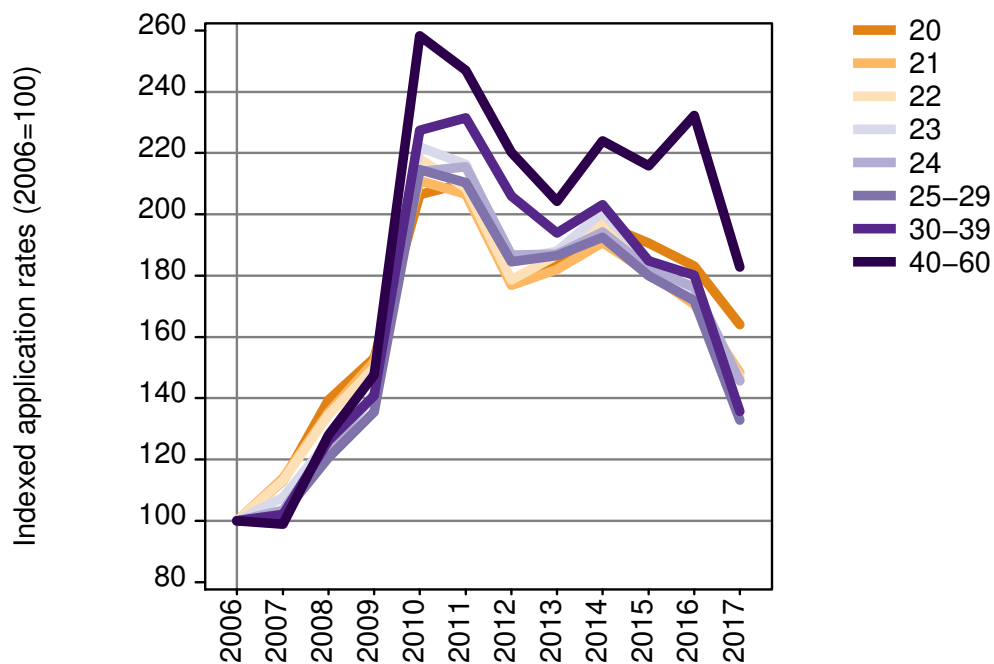


Figure 28 shows the application rates for all age groups (except the 18 and 19 year old age groups) from England, indexed such that the rate in 2006 equals 100. This shows how application rates for each age group have changed – in a proportional sense – in relation to the start of the reporting period. For example, a value of 200 means the application rate is twice that of the rate in 2006.

Between 2006 and 2010, the application rates for all age groups more than doubled. In 2011, the rates for some age groups continued to increase, while for others they fell, but the rates for all age groups remained more than twice those seen in 2006. Application rates then fell in subsequent cycles for all age groups, before increasing in 2014 and then falling in 2015. In 2016, rates for all age groups, except the 40 to 60 age group, continued to fall. This trend was continued in 2017, with the application rates of all age groups falling. Despite these recent falls, the application rates in 2017 for all age groups were higher than at the start of the period. The application rate for the 40 to 60 age group was around 80 per cent higher compared to 2006, while the rate for 20 year olds was around 60 per cent higher. The application rates for all other age groups shown were between 30 and 50 per cent higher than in 2006.

**Figure 28 January deadline application rates from England by age (indexed to 2006 = 100)**



## Annex A: 18 year old population context

Over half of all UK applicants at the January deadline are aged 18. This analysis uses country-specific age definitions that align with the cut-off points for school/college cohorts in the different administrations of the UK. For the 2017 cycle, England and Wales ages are defined on 31 August 2016, for Northern Ireland on 1 July 2016, and for Scotland on 28 February 2017. Defining ages in this way matches the assignment of children to school cohorts and means the group of applicants treated as 18 year olds in each country will generally be applying to UCAS for the first time.

The population estimates are based on ONS' mid-year estimates and national population projections controlled to UK countries (published in June 2015). For 16 to 20 year olds, the estimates are obtained by ageing 15 year olds from the appropriate number of years earlier. This approach avoids the estimates being susceptible to changes in net migration (including overseas students) during these ages. Older ages are obtained from the mid-year estimates and national population projections without ageing. In both cases, the estimates are adjusted from age at mid-year to age on the country-specific reference dates, using the monthly distribution of births. Analysis of application rates by area-based background are supported through small area population estimates available from the Office for National Statistics, National Records for Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. These small area population estimates have been revised to be consistent with the national level population estimates.

Figure 29 shows the population of the 18 year old cohort by UK country for the cohorts covered in this report. England is shown on a separate axis (left hand side) to the other countries of the UK. On the basis used in this report, the 2017 18 year old cohort size to the nearest thousand (proportion of UK cohort) is 624,000 (84 per cent) for England, 24,000 (three per cent) for Northern Ireland, 57,000 (eight per cent) for Scotland, and 36,000 (five per cent) for Wales. The relatively large size of the cohort in England (ten to 25 times that of the other UK countries) means that some analysis, such as application rates by background and sex, are easier to interpret for England than for the other countries, where small base population sizes introduce appreciable year to year variations.

Figure 30 shows these same figures indexed to the size of the 2009 cohort, to show the trends in cohort size between the different countries more clearly. Since 2009, the size of the cohort has reduced for each country. In the 2017 cycle, the 18 year old cohort changed proportionally against the 2009 cohort by -1.0 per cent in England, -1.0 per cent in Northern Ireland, -2.5 per cent in Scotland, and -2.2 per cent in Wales. These different changes include a component resulting from the different age reference dates.

In 2017, the 18 year old cohort compared to 2009 is 6.6 per cent smaller (-44,200) in England, 6.9 per cent smaller (-1,800) in Northern Ireland, 11.6 per cent smaller (-7,500) in Scotland, and 11.9 per cent smaller (-4,800) in Wales. This is a reduction across the UK of around 58,300 since 2009, -7.3 per cent proportionally. If the

observed 2017 application rates were to be applied to a population of the same size as the 2009 cohort, there would have been around 21,200 more 18 year old applicants in 2017.

**Figure 29 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK**

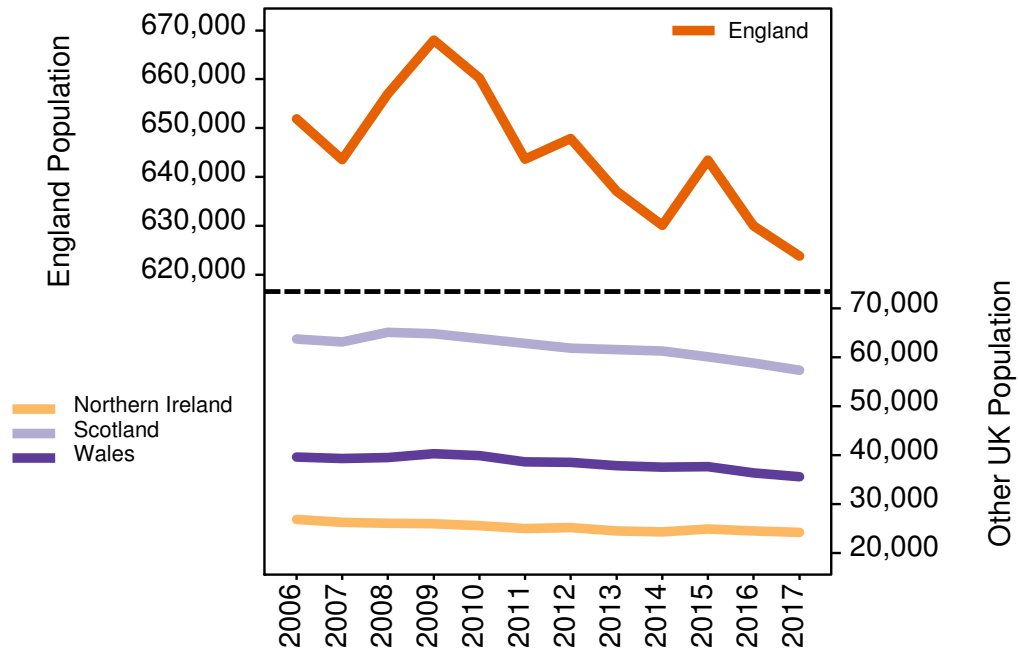
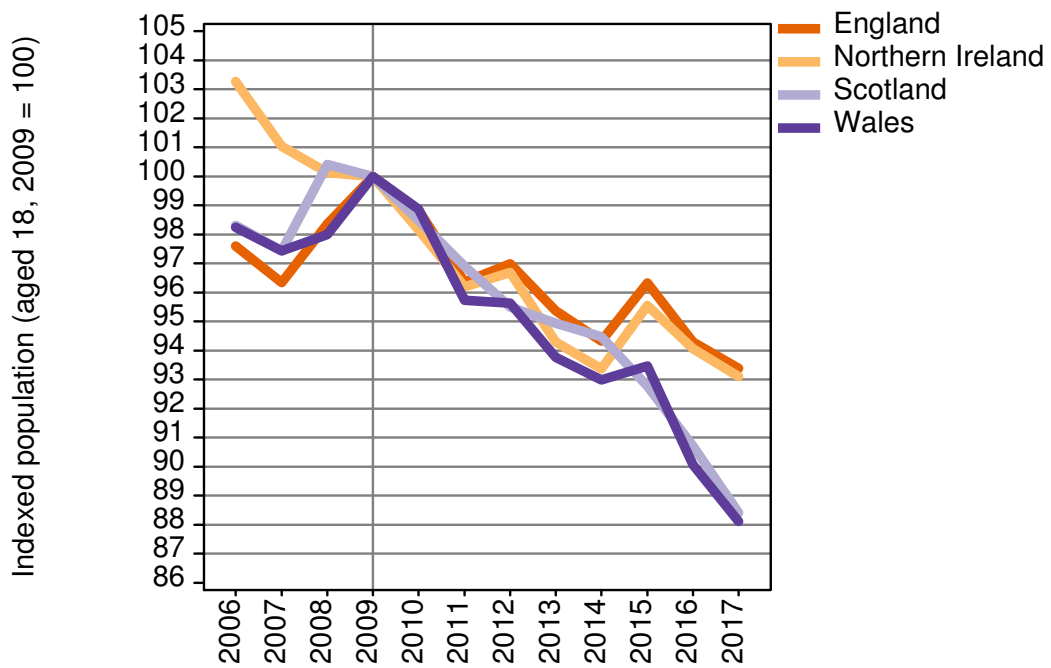




Figure 30 Population estimates for 18 year olds by country of the UK (indexed to 2009 = 100)



## Incorporating population estimates

The population estimates used in this report are based on ONS mid-year estimates and national population projections, which have been aligned to the 2011 census.

The 15 year old population in these estimates (apportioned to school cohorts, rather than age at mid-year) is of particular interest, since it is this group that is aged to give the core 18 year old estimates (the 'derived' 18 year old estimates). This group is aged, rather than the 18 year olds being used directly, to avoid inaccuracies that can relate from varying numbers of non-UK domiciled 18 year olds being resident at age 18 (for example, international students).

The use of these estimates results in a difference in the direction of population change for derived 18 year olds between 2013 and 2014 (based on the 15 year olds in 2010 and 2011). The ONS mid-year estimates show a 0.5 per cent increase in the population between these years, while trends derived from other administrative population sources (including school statistics and benefit records) show a one per cent decrease. In each case, the derived 18 year old population estimates show the 18 year old population to have risen between 2013 and 2014, compared to the other administrative sources which show the population to have fallen.

The difference in these trends is due to the revision of the mid-year estimates to be consistent with the 2011 census. These estimates cover all ages and, because of the estimation methods involved in the census, are intended to be most accurate for age bands rather than single years of age.<sup>3</sup> The ONS has advised that adjustments to the 2011 census to account for missing data are thought to have led to a small over-estimation of the number of 15 year olds, and under-estimation of the number of 16 to 19 year olds, predominately those aged 16.<sup>4</sup>

This effect for 15 and 16 year olds in 2011 will mostly affect the number of 18 year olds in the derived estimates used in this work for 2013 and 2014. To minimise this issue, the derived estimates are based on the mid-year estimates but with an adjustment for 15 year olds in 2010 (who are based on 16 year olds in the 2011 census), and 15 year olds in 2011 (based on 15 year olds in the 2011 census). For these years, an adjustment is made so the proportional changes in the population across 2009, 2010, and 2011 match those observed for the total number of UK 15

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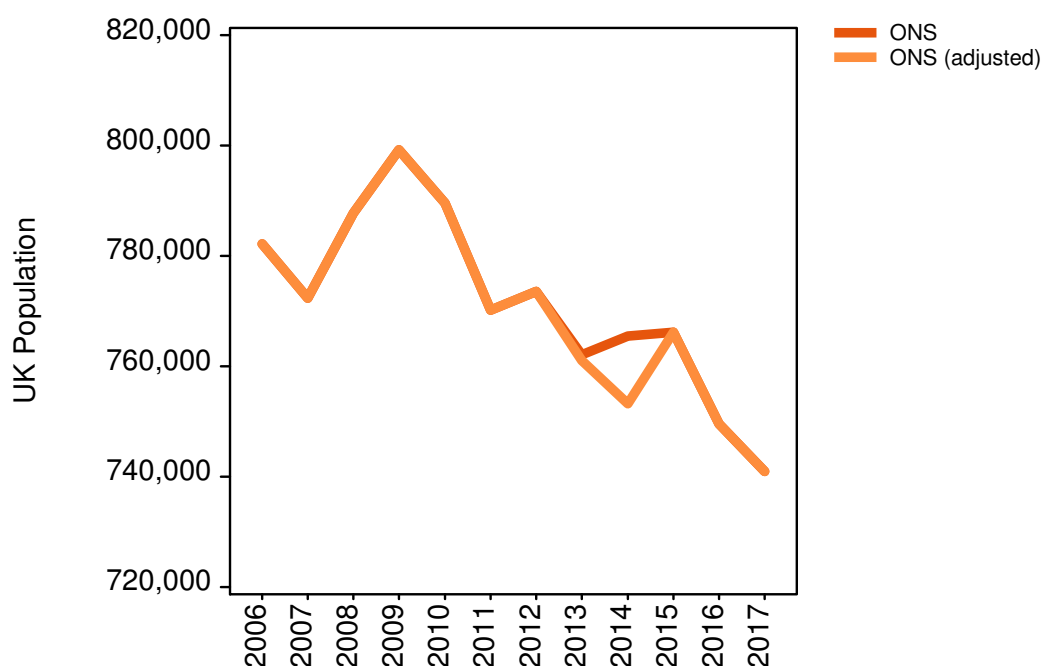
<sup>3</sup> See Section D of the technical notes in the Department for Education Statistical First Release Participation in education, training, and employment by 16-18 year olds in England ([www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/209934/Participation\\_SFR\\_end\\_2012\\_-\\_FINALv2.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209934/Participation_SFR_end_2012_-_FINALv2.pdf)).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/census-data/2011-census-user-guide/quality-and-methods/quality/quality-notes-and-clarifications/index.html](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/census-data/2011-census-user-guide/quality-and-methods/quality/quality-notes-and-clarifications/index.html).

year old school pupils.<sup>5</sup> That is, the mid-year estimates of 15 year olds in 2009 (based in part on 17 year olds in the 2011 census) are taken as correct and then the 2010 and 2011 figures derived by proportional changes from that figure. This adjustment results in the derived 18 year old population for 2013 being 0.1 per cent lower than when based on the (unadjusted) mid-year estimates, while for 2014, they are 1.6 per cent lower.

Because the ONS mid-year population estimates for 2015 are unlikely to be materially affected (as 2011 census population estimates for 14 year olds, who would be aged 18 in 2015, are unaffected by adjustments to account for missing data), they are not adjusted, and comparison between these estimates and the total number of UK 15 year old school pupils shows a similar proportional increase in the population between 15 year olds in 2011 and 2012 (18 year olds in 2014 and 2015). For similar reasons, no adjustments are made for the 2016 or 2017 population estimates.

**Figure 31 ONS 15 year old mid-year population estimates with and without adjustment**



<sup>5</sup> Numbers given in Table 5 of the Education and Training Statistics for the UK: 2013 ([www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-and-training-statistics-for-the-uk-2013](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/education-and-training-statistics-for-the-uk-2013)) published by the Department for Education. Adjustment applied to derived figures on same age definition.